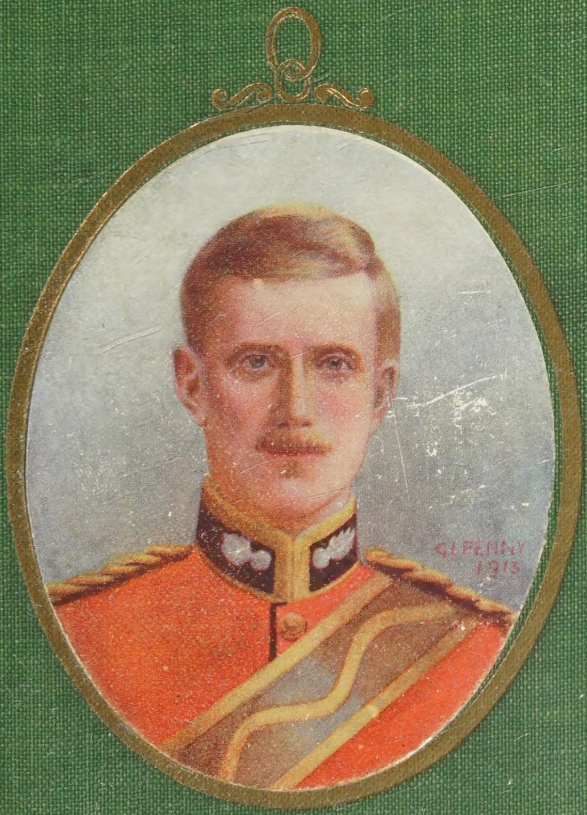
LOVE IN THE HILLS



F. E. PENNY

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LOVE IN THE HILLS

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

HISTORY OF FORT ST. GEORGE, MADRAS
ON THE COROMANDEL COAST
THE NAUTCH GIRL
THE FOREST OFFICER
A MIXED MARRIAGE
THE SANYASI
DILYS
CASTE AND CREED
THE TEA-PLANTER
THE INEVITABLE LAW
DARK CORNERS
THE UNLUCKY MARK
SACRIFICE
THE RAJAH
THE MALABAR MAGICIAN
THE OUTCASTE

LOVE IN THE HILLS

BY

F. E. PENNY

AUTHOR OF

"THE SANYASI," "THE RAJAH" "THE OUTCASTE," ETC.

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The scene is laid on the Nilgiri Hills, South India.

CHARACTERS.

Captain George Warborough, R.E.		
Colonel Oswald	Officers quartered at the Military Station of Wellington.	
Major Berringham		
Captain Devon		
Lieutenant Bewley		
Colonel Tredmere	Nonia Armscote's Guardian.	
Dick Pensax	A Prospector.	
Mr. Lutterworth	Assistant Superintendent of Police.	
Mrs. Oswald		
Nonia Armscote		
Miss Madersfield	Her Chaperone.	
Mrs. Cotheridge		On a Visit to Coonoor.
Pansy	Her Daughters	
Ivy		
Mrs. Honington		
Maud	Her Daughter	
Houssain	A Muhammadan Sepoy, pensioned.	
Abdul	His Nephew.	
Periyar	A Hindu; Watchman at Chamra House.	
Pishasha	A Monkey belonging to Houssain.	
Teddy	A Bear	Belonging to Nonia Armscote.
Tiglath Pileser	A Panther Cub	
Ricki-tiki-tavi	A Mongoose	
And other Animals		

LOVE IN THE HILLS

CHAPTER I

Captain George Warborough of the Royal Engineers looked at his watch. It was just four o'clock. He was returning from a long tramp in the hills above Coonoor. He had started out alone from the Glenview Hotel after an early breakfast with the intention of being back to lunch; but as there was sufficient reason for prolonging his ramble he had allowed the time to slip by; and four o'clock found him tired and thirsty at the gate of a solitary house on the outskirts of Coonoor.

It was generally supposed that Warborough was on leave; he was not connected with military duty at Wellington, nor was he attached to any of the Government offices at Ootacamund. He passed his time riding and walking over the hills. A good hand-camera was his constant companion, and he often carried a light rifle as well. The two suggested that he was merely amusing himself after his own fancy.

On arrival he had called on the visitors and residents in Coonoor according to custom; he had also looked up the officers quartered at Wellington, the military station adjoining Coonoor. His social duties had even taken him to Ootacamund, twelve miles higher up, where he left his card and wrote his name in the visitors' book at Government House.

With camera slung over his shoulder and rifle under his arm he had been swinging down from the Kotagiri direction at a steady pace for the last hour. Tired as he was, he was not too exhausted to appreciate the rare beauty of the scenery.

The path he followed turned and twisted, mounting the bare shoulder of a hill here and descending into the deep shadows of a shola there. The cool shade and subdued light came as a relief after the glare of the sun on the hill-top. Great stems of the forest trees reared their crowns of foliage high above his head, leaving space and room for flowering shrubs below. Trails of creeper, wreathed in pale purple blossom, hung in festoons from the boughs and linked the trees with the undergrowth of strobilanthes, wild laurel, and the mauve osbeckia.

At the bottom of every valley ran a mountain stream over a course of water-worn stones and boulders. The limpid water was hidden under masses of tree-ferns and beds of moss, except when it passed over a slab of embedded rock or broke into foam against the grey boulders.

Warborough was strongly attracted towards the jungle. It had a peculiar fascination for him at all times of the day. No matter what the hour, it seemed steeped in silence as he passed through it. As soon as he stopped he became conscious of the chorus of the woods and valleys ; the splash of water, the twitter of birds with occasional bursts into song, the rustle of foliage high over his head as the mountain breeze swept over the tops of the trees, the croak of a tree frog, the chirrup of a lizard, the humming of bees and whirring of cicalas. More than once he seated himself on a wayside boulder to watch and listen ; and each time he discovered in the chorus a new voice that had escaped him before.

Cooled and refreshed with his short rest he climbed

up the opposite slope and reached the summit of a sun-bathed hill shoulder, long since denuded of forest by ancient charcoal burners. From it he caught sight of the Hoolicul Droog, the magnificent mass that stands sentinel over the pass. Its precipitous walls of dark rock afforded no foothold for vegetation. Primeval forest, where never the foot of man had trod, covered its rounded head and clothed its feet. As Warborough looked at it, it was purpling under the afternoon sun, the blood-red shoots of the iron-wood trees giving a crimson tone to the ultra-marine ether.

The heat was not only to be felt, but seen in the quivering waves that rippled over the wide valley of the pass. It was like the shadowy water of a dream sea, softening the tropical landscape and bringing its rich contrasts into harmony. The breeze that had blown down from the mountains in the morning was gone; and as Warborough pulled up at the gate of Chamra House he was acutely sensible of his desire for afternoon tea. His flask had been emptied at least three hours ago as he made a moderate lunch off biscuits. He had passed by several brooks. The temptation to dip his cup in the stream was great, but he had resisted. Dysentery and fever lurked in the clear water for all its innocent sparkle. He had waited to reach a safer fount, but had not found one.

As he stopped at the entrance to the grounds he leaned his arm on the top rail of the gate, keenly alive to the fact that in all probability tea was already laid in the broad creeper-covered verandah; the kettle was boiling and the excellent scones, for which Miss Armscote's cook was famous, were buttered and ready to be served crisp and hot.

There was no reason in this case why he should resist temptation, except that he was not in calling kit; but

his acquaintance with Nonia Armscote and the lady with whom she lived was sufficiently intimate to warrant a request for tea. He opened the gate and passed through, carefully closing it behind him and securing it with a chain.

The carriage drive curved round a high bank formed by a grass-covered cutting in the hill-side which hid the house from view, but not the garden and lawn. On the other side of the drive was a belt of shrubbery bordered by a broad flower-bed. Beyond the border and belt of shrubs stretched a tennis ground containing two courts. It was lower than the flower bed ; and when it was finished it was considered a triumph of skill to have made so large a terrace of level ground.

It was Warborough's nature to be deliberate in all his movements. He was rarely betrayed into haste, perhaps because he was a slow thinker. Having considered a question from all points, and made up his mind to a course of action, it took more than a little to prevent him from carrying it out. Determination backed by a quiet obstinacy brought attainment of his design when a less persevering man would have given it up altogether.

He decided to go in and ask Nonia Armscote for a cup of tea ; so he opened the gate and strolled along the drive as if he had made a call the chief object of his walk.

Suddenly an obstacle presented itself that was quite out of his reckoning. A young bear, which he knew by name as Teddy, one of Miss Armscote's many pets, pushed and nosed his way through the mass of rhododendrons and laurels which bordered the drive, slid rapidly down the bank and shambled into the middle of the path with snorts and deep breathings, barring the way.

"Hello ! Teddy, old man ! What are you up to this afternoon ?" said Warborough, expecting the bear's

keeper to follow close upon his charge. He made a movement to pass. At the same time Teddy raised himself into an upright position, wagging his head to and fro with a gesture of cunning mischief; he seemed to say, "No; you don't."

Warborough stood still, and the bear sat down on his haunches, relapsing into thoughtful contemplation of the visitor. As no keeper appeared Warborough made another attempt to slip by.

"It's all right, Teddy," he said in a coaxing tone. "I won't hurt you; just let me pass, there's a good fellow!"

Once more he tried; Teddy was ready for him, and stood up obstructive and unyielding.

Amused at the animal's manœuvres Warborough adopted another method. Turning slightly he walked to the edge of the flower border, hoping to pass in that way. Teddy was not to be deceived. He shuffled after him in a rough, playful manner that had a species of devilry in it, and again barred the road.

"Caught out that time!" murmured Warborough, keeping a wary eye on two furry arms furnished with sharp claws that were stretched towards him. "Now, why wasn't I trained as a B. P. Scout or a circus performer! it would have come in useful here. Shall have to invent another dodge."

Pretending to change his mind as to the object of his walk, he stepped on to the flower border, doing his best not to damage the plants. To his annoyance Teddy followed his example, shambling along parallel with him and causing havoc among the dahlias, fuchsias, and chrysanthemums, and crushing the carnations beyond recovery.

"Look here, Teddy," said Warborough, still apostrophizing the bear. "This is going a bit too far; we shall both get into trouble if we practise our 'Bostoning' on

your mistress's flower beds! Just stop it! and let me get by!"

He raised his rifle as if to hit him with it, in the hope that the bear might be frightened. It had no more effect than if he had taken off his hat to the offender. Teddy scratched in the soft leaf mould as though he would make a comfortable lair for himself during this self-imposed "sentry-go" over his prisoner.

Warborough was beginning to feel a certain amount of annoyance. He wanted his tea; and he could not help being conscious that there was an element of the ridiculous in the situation. Of danger there was none; at any moment he could shoot him; but this would land him in difficulties with the bear's owner, which was the last thing he wished to happen. To own himself beaten and to return to the road defeated and tealess was also an impossible course.

"Very well! Master Ted! Let me tell you that you haven't won yet! So long! my friend!"

He retreated as if he were going to the gate; but after a step or two turned aside, and quietly pushed his way through the shrubs behind the flowers till he was hidden from the bear's sight. He hoped that when once Teddy had lost sight of him he would forget his purpose and bestow his attention on some other matter. Warborough stepped down on to the tennis ground from which he knew there was a path to the house.

He was just congratulating himself that he had given Bruin the slip, and was half-way to the point by which he hoped to escape, when Teddy burst through the yellow mimosa at the edge of the tennis ground, galloped after him with ungainly speed, and planted himself directly in his path.

"Look here, you scoundrel! this is past a joke. Get

out of my way!" cried Warborough, losing patience for the first time and speaking in an angry tone.

There was no doubt of its result upon Teddy. He opened his mouth, showing a fine set of small white teeth, and stretched his arms out with a threat of coming to closer quarters. A hug from a muddy young bear could not be called a joke; and as Teddy leaned further towards his victim there was no alternative but to back out of reach. The bear, having lost his balance, dropped on all fours, wagged his foolish head over his failure, opened his mouth again as if to express surprise, and shuffled a few steps forward. After a short consideration he decided to repeat the game, with the result that Warborough was again obliged to retreat a few feet. This continued the length of the court till Warborough found himself with his back against the wire netting at the end of the ground.

Reluctant to hurt the animal, he had no intention all the same of allowing himself to be raked by the sharp curved nails, which were capable of inflicting nasty wounds. For the first time it occurred to him to call for help. Houssain, an old sepoy pensioner, employed by Miss Armscote as keeper to her pets, was probably dozing within hail.

"Houssain!" he called loudly; and at once from the back premises of the bungalow came an answering shout of "Sahib!"

Teddy heard it too. He was on the point of hugging his new friend for whom he had conceived this sudden and embarrassing affection, but he dropped back on all fours. Sitting down promptly on his haunches, he assumed a pensive attitude of innocence, rubbed his jowl with a muddy forepaw like a huge overgrown tom-cat, and pretended to be unconscious even of the presence of the stranger.

Almost at the same moment Warborough heard a muffled laugh behind the wire screen; and Miss Armscote appeared, trying hard to suppress her merriment.

"Oh! Captain Warborough! I am so sorry that Teddy has been worrying you; but how quaint of him to corner you in that way! As I came down the hill I saw him stalk you right across the court; it looked so funny!"

Again her merry laugh rang out as she hurried round the screen to his side and caught her pet by the collar.

Warborough smiled and raised his hat without the least touch of embarrassment; as if being stalked across a tennis court by a powerful bear cub was quite an ordinary occurrence.

"Good afternoon, Miss Armscote. I was passing your way and thought I would look in. Teddy met me in the drive and wanted me to dance the 'bunny-hug' with him. My education has not been brought up-to-date, and I was just trying to convince him that it was not among my accomplishments when you arrived."

"Poor old Teddy! He didn't mean any harm. I can't think how he got loose this afternoon. Oh! here is Houssain! I am so glad you came in like this!"—then seeing him smile—"I don't mean I'm glad you've had such a warm reception from Teddy!"

The sepoy hurried forward and took charge of the bear. His touch was firm but gentle. A stream of apologies without any extenuating excuses for the animal poured from his lips; and then followed the usual torrent of abuse of the offender, who was properly cursed in Hindustani together with all his female relatives to the fifth generation. The bear abandoned his detached look of innocence and put on a solemn expression in which Warborough thought he detected fear.

"Don't beat the animal," he said, noting the expression,

"If any one is to be punished it should be the person in charge of the bear who let him loose. You don't allow your pets to run wild in the compound, do you, Miss Armscote?"

"Certainly not; Abdul, the dog-boy, should have been looking after Teddy. Where is Abdul?" she asked of Houssain.

"Gracious lady! he has gone in search of the porcupine which burrowed a hole under the go-down door and escaped, the low-born pig!"

"Oh! poor Porky! and its broken leg is still useless! What shall we do? Lead Teddy away and chain him up till Abdul comes back and can take him for a walk in the jungle. Come along, Captain Warborough; you are no longer a prisoner. You deserve some tea after the bad treatment you have had."

She led the way along the path to the house. The air was filled with the scent of mimosa blossom and heliotrope. The homely sweet-william grew cheek by jowl with the gardenia, and the humble snapdragon lifted its spikes of yellow and orange flowers under the shelter of a flaming poinsettia. Balsams, zinnias and tawny chrysanthemums flourished under a hedge of plumbago, over which the blossoms of a crimson hybiscus pushed their way. Close to the house was a border of choice pansies, their solemn faces lifted in a steady gaze towards the sun; and in all directions roses grew rampantly, each after the manner of its habit, scattering petals on gravel and lawn and flower bed.

"So a porcupine is the latest addition to your large army of pets? Now that must be a really nice animal to pet! I wish you would teach me how to tame a porcupine. Do you stroke it or scratch its ear, or what?" said Warborough in his chaffing manner.

"Oh, well! I don't exactly pet it as I would a kitten."

"Or take it on your lap! Hardly suitable for such attentions I should think. Why did you choose it?"

"I didn't! it chose me! At least we were brought together by force of circumstances."

"Like a great many other things—and people," he commented under his breath.

"The poor thing was found among the artichokes in the vegetable garden with a broken leg. Periyar, the watchman, was furious because poor Porky had grubbed up half a row of his own particular artichokes. I have a strong suspicion that Periyar broke its leg himself with a stone. I don't like that man, nor does Houssain."

"Why don't you send him away?"

"I can't. He is paid by the landlord, and therefore he is not my servant."

"Ask the landlord to dismiss him."

"I have—more than once; but it is of no use. You see he has an interest in the place. His master pays him to look after the property by allowing him to cultivate a strip of ground between the garden and the shola; and he supplies the market at Coonoor with vegetables. I was sure that he had hurt the porcupine; that was the very reason I felt bound to take in the poor creature and nurse it. Houssian, of course, acted as doctor."

Warborough chuckled. "I should like to have seen Houssain operating on poor Porky."

"There was nobody else to do it. I offered to help, but he said he could manage better with Abdul. It was the left hind leg."

"Left or right, I shouldn't relish the task of having to set the broken limb of a strong active porcupine. The kindest thing to have done would have been to put it out of its misery."

They were close to the portico of the house. She stopped and faced him.

"Is that what you would have done if I had asked you to treat it?" she said quickly, her eyes upon his.

"Probably," then seeing an ominous flash, he added, "unless you had told me to spare its wretched little life."

"I should have ordered you to spare it as you valued my friendship."

"I am your most humble servant, as Houssain would say," he replied with a laugh that did not cover the expression of his eyes. Hers fell before his; but even so she rejoined—

"You men are too fond of shooting and killing. I am sure you have been prowling in my sholas all the morning ready to fire at any beast or bird that might cross your path."

"Didn't know that they were your sholas; thought they belonged to Government."

"Did you kill anything?"

"Made a fine bag! A village pig; a Toda buffalo; an old hill-woman and her best hen; a pie-dog; and I might have shot a fine Teddy bear; but I spared him for his mistress's sake."

She laughed, and the serious lines that had suddenly gathered about her mouth at the thought of possible hurt done to the wild things in the jungle vanished.

"No; but really; did you see anything to shoot?"

"Not a creature!"

"Then why do you carry that rifle?"

"Er—for protection," he replied with a twinkle of amusement in his eye as he caught her glance of swift inquiry before she realised that once more he was chaffing.

"Protection! how silly you are! What do you want to be protected from? the jungle fowl and Nilgiri robins?"

"There are leopards."

"They won't touch you if you leave them alone. If you wound one, of course, you must look out for trouble. It will be of your own making."

"And bears!" he added with a rueful expression as he remembered Teddy's recent overtures.

"You mustn't be too hard on Teddy. After all he was only trying to give you a warm welcome."

"I would rather have a warm welcome from some one else," he said unblushingly, as he watched for the little flash that he knew would come.

"How can you expect any welcome at all after the bag you say you have made! However, as you didn't add Teddy to it, I'll let Auntie welcome you, and give you a lovely tea."

"I'm sure she will be kind to a poor tramp dying of thirst. I haven't had a drop to drink since I emptied my flask at lunch."

They reached the door of the bungalow which stood open. Warborough put down his rifle and camera, and followed her through the drawing-room and out on to the wide creeper-covered verandah where the tea was laid.

CHAPTER II

"Nonia, you are late. How do you do, Captain Warborough? Butler! bring tea quickly."

Having fired these three sentences at three separate individuals, Miss Mary Madersfield seated herself before the tea-tray with an expression round the lines of her mouth which was intended to indicate a resignation she was far from feeling.

"Only five minutes behind time, Auntie," replied Nonia in a propitiatory tone.

Miss Madersfield was a well-preserved woman of fifty. Nonia's guardian, Colonel Tredmere, had arranged that she should come out to India with his ward and remain there as long as she was required.

"Where have you been since lunch, Nonia?" she asked, as she busied herself with the tea.

"In the jungle at the back of the tennis courts. Have some of this tea-cake, Auntie; it's very good, isn't it, Captain Warborough?"

"Excellent!" he assented with the warmth of a hungry man. "I wonder what is the attraction that lures you to the jungle in the hottest part of the afternoon," a faint gleam of curiosity crossed his face. "It must have been something very important, a sick monkey or a disabled cat."

"I went to see my two blood-suckers. Poor dears! The dogs worried them, and somehow they lost their tails.

I am nursing them in a large wooden box till they have recovered from the shock."

"Nonia is full of sentimental fancies," remarked Miss Madersfield. "Lizards can drop their tails when they please. I don't believe the dogs bit them off."

"Dogs usually let blood-suckers alone. They bark and pretend to attack; but I don't believe they touch the things," said Warborough.

"Miss Armscote thought they were half killed, and she brought them into the bungalow," explained Miss Madersfield in an aggrieved tone. "She wanted to make a hospital for them at the end of the verandah; but I absolutely refused to allow it; and begged her to take the horrid creatures away. 'Put them anywhere you like outside,' I said; 'but let it be nothing less than a hundred yards from the house. I draw the line at blood-suckers as pets.'"

"They're harmless enough in spite of their unpleasant name," said Warborough.

"No name is bad enough for creatures that are the descendants of antediluvian dragons and wyverns," said Miss Madersfield with a rooted conviction hopeless to combat. "Believe me, Captain Warborough, Miss Armscote would harbour a cobra if it suffered from toothache; and she would give Houssain no peace till he acted as dentist to the invalid."

Both Nonia and Warborough laughed. "How do you feed the things?" he asked.

"With flies and poochees of all sorts. I put down sugared papers and Cox and Box, as I call them, help themselves."

"I think it is flying in the face of Providence to make pets of reptiles," said Miss Madersfield, severely.

"Dear Auntie, you mustn't be so old-fashioned, you

must progress with the times." She turned to Warborough. "I am doing my best to persuade Auntie that as we have no poor and no orphans and no slums out here we must keep our hearts warm by a practical kindness to animals."

Miss Madersfield's features relaxed into a smile. "I don't see how maintaining a Zoo will keep my heart warm, as you call it. It is more likely to put me into a lunatic asylum."

"You don't understand. It's not the actual Zoo that does it; it's the fact of being kind to something. Nobody sits still and waits for things to happen to them nowadays. Every one is helping on some cause or other. It makes you forget all the little worries of your everyday life. If I were at home I suppose I should be slumming—no, that's out of date—I should be supporting the Boy-Scout movement, or running a girls' club, or starting an orphanage for aeroplanists' children. Don't you think, Captain Warborough, that if Auntie doesn't want to help me in my league-of-mercy-to-wild-animals scheme, she might strike out a line for herself and find a Cause among the servants? They often have such terrible colds, and fever, poor things, on the hills."

A rattle of hoofs diverted the attention of Miss Madersfield, and put an end to the discussion. The visitors were shown into the verandah, and came forward full of excitement over the news of their Cause, whichever it might be. It was evident in this respect that they were quite up to date. The Cause to-day was their own pleasure.

"We have just been to the committee meeting about the ball that is to be given by the ladies of Coonoor and Wellington at the club; and we have come to tell you all about it," said Maud Honington after greetings had been exchanged, and the visitors seated within reach of the tea-table. "You ought to have been there, Nonia."

"Sorry I couldn't manage it. Has everybody joined?" asked Nonia, handing the scones.

"Yes; I think all the women in Coonoor and Wellington have put their names down."

"The women!" exclaimed Miss Madersfield. "You don't mean to say that the women of the regiment——"

"No, no, Auntie; Maud means the ladies of the place," said Nonia, hurriedly.

"Yes; the ladies if you like, though the term is not the thing to apply to one's friends, nowadays," said Maud. "It's all right, Miss Madersfield; we're not mixing the classes up here at present, though you may be pretty certain that it's coming. What I wanted to tell you is that the committee has decided to make it a fancy dress dance."

"A very good idea," replied Nonia, who was included in the list of the "women."

"Mrs. Oswald, our chairman, proposed that fancy dress should be optional," said Pansy Cotheridge, who with her sister had come with Maud.

"Unless it is optional I shall not go," said Miss Madersfield.

"I will make you a dress, Auntie. You shall be a 'poor thing,' a dear woolly polar bear, an orphan, and I will be your nurse."

"I have decided to go as a pansy, my namesake," said Miss Cotheridge. "I want you to let me have heaps of pansies, Nonia. Yours are the best in the place. I want to cover myself with them, hair and neck and bodice until I'm all pansies."

"It will take a good many to do that," began Nonia, thinking of the raid such a request would make upon her bed of flowers.

"Anyway, I should like as many as you can spare, I mean," she replied.

"I want to go as the spirit of roses," said her sister Ivy. "Will you let me have some roses?"

"Certainly, you shall have every blossom in the garden. What are you going as, Maud?"

"The queen of diamonds; and oh! Nonia, dear! will you be the blessedest of old things and lend me your diamonds? You won't want them if you go as a nurse, and I will take the greatest care of them. They will be the making of my dress."

"Of course you shall have them!" replied Nonia without a moment's hesitation.

Miss Madersfield was occupied with Warborough, and did not hear Nonia's rash promise of the jewels. He had asked her where the path led that ran through the jungle at the back of the house, and who used it.

"This place is all hill paths," said Miss Madersfield, who rarely answered a question directly. "If you are not going up, you are going down hill. When I first came here I used to walk that way; but I dare not do it now. I have a weak heart, and I'm obliged to limit my walking to the tennis courts where the ground is level."

She rambled off into symptoms and signs which for years had seemed to indicate an imminent heart attack that never came. He heard her patiently, and as soon as he could get a word in he said—

"Does it lead to a village on the other side of the shola?"

To which she replied that hill villages were the most evil-smelling spots in the world. She had once been to a Budaga village—no—she wasn't sure—now she came to think of it, it was a Toda village or a Toda encampment; and what with the buffaloes and fowls and dogs—half wild things and very savage—and children——

"Is the village Budaga or Toda?" he asked, as she faltered for want of breath.

"I don't think there is anything to choose between those two hill tribes, they are all alike—ugly and unsavoury."

"Surely the Toda is a herdsman and the Budaga an agriculturist."

"I don't care what you call them. I always try to avoid a Budaga when I see one coming up the road. His clothes are so often sodden, and from the look of them never washed." She shuddered. "You don't know what disease germs those hill men carry with them. I have a weak throat; at this very moment it is relaxed. I always order my rickshaw men to run past a Budaga as fast as they can go."

"Do many natives use the path?"

"I think the way natives prowl about private compounds in these days is disgraceful. I have no doubt that there are swarms of them hiding in the jungle behind us at this very minute, just waiting for what they can pick up as soon as they think no one is looking. They take good care not to let me see them!"

There was a pause in the conversation, and Warborough, with the persistence peculiar to his nature, turned to Nonia and asked whether the village beyond the shola behind the house was inhabited by Budagas or Todas.

"There is no village," she replied.

"Where does the path lead?"

"To the open moorland on the top of the hill, and to Kotagiri if you strike across the plateau, I believe; but it is some miles away, and the path is very much overgrown."

The conversation returned to the subject of the ball, and Captain Warborough was questioned as to what

dress he intended to wear. Tea being ended a move was made. The three girls prepared to go on their way, far too busy, they declared, to be able to look at the Zoo. They had accomplished their object and secured a promise of flowers and jewels, which they knew would be kept, and they were anxious to make calls elsewhere and carry the news of the committee's decision.

"Maud will look very well as Queen of Diamonds. I have promised to lend her mine, they will suit her style of figure," said Nonia, as she and Warborough watched the departing guests.

"Never knew a woman yet whom diamonds didn't suit," he remarked. "But won't you want them yourself?"

"Not if I go as a nurse. I suppose it wouldn't do to take dear little Porky as my patient—that is to say if Abdul can find him. What a sensation he would create!" she said, her laughter burbling like the mountain stream. "Are you in a hurry? No? Then come and see my leopard cub. It takes the bottle like a baby, and is the sweetest duckiest soft thing in the world."

They passed through the garden, climbing up a path that wound through a wild shrubbery, and came out upon a level terrace fenced in with wild laurels and guavas, wattle, orange trees, and luxuriant briars bearing masses of small semi-double pink roses. A long shed that had been used in past days for cattle was partitioned off into what Nonia called dens. Here she kept her various and varying pets—for somehow or other they never remained with her long—with Houssain and Abdul as keeper and feeder of the animals.

Immediately below on another terrace in the hill side stood the bungalow, accommodating itself to its situation, and spreading out lengthways. The back verandah looked

towards the forest-clad mountain that rose in magnificent sweeps upwards to a succession of bold headlands. In front of the house the ground fell away in undulations, and Coonoor nestled among its gum-trees on knolls and in little valleys, down to the very edge of the great cliff that frowned over road and rail in the ghât pass.

Most of the dens were occupied or appropriated. In one a leopard cub was shut up. In another with a wire netting enclosure was a fierce-looking kite with a broken wing. A third compartment stabled a small timid jungle sheep. A young hill buffalo and a goat were browsing outside. They were tame enough to be allowed their liberty by day.

Nonia stopped at the den of the jungle sheep, and opened the top half of the door. The creature stared at her with distrust.

"Poor thing! it was wounded by a shot in the jungle. Houssain found it and brought it in. Have you seen any about?"

"No; I didn't come across a single jungle sheep to-day, and I walked twenty miles if I walked an inch."

"You're on the look-out for them, though," she said suspiciously.

"I certainly keep my eyes open, if that's what you mean. Yes; I'm on the look-out for all kinds of animals and birds."

"What for, if you don't want to shoot them?"

"I might like to take one home—a jungle pig, for instance—and make a pet of it, teach it to do tricks, and trust, and all that. I don't see why you should have a monopoly."

"Oh, nonsense! you're chaffing again!"

"Well! if you must know—you'll keep it a dead secret, of course?"

"Yes! yes!"

He lowered his voice as he looked into her eyes. "I'm a photograph-hunter of the deadliest kind. I'm always trying to catch the game with my camera."

She looked puzzled. "But why this secrecy?"

"The animals don't like it. I was afraid that you would put up a notice in your sholas cautioning the beasts."

"How foolish you are! I don't believe a word you're saying!"

"Still doubting and distrusting me? I'm afraid your experience of our sex hasn't inspired you with confidence in our good faith, Miss Armscote," he continued, more in fun than with any serious intent.

The swift dropping of her eyes, the abrupt movement she made towards the leopard's den, and the slight heightening of colour left him with the impression that he had unwittingly touched a tender spot, had blundered in where the proverbial angel would have feared to tread. It was not a mistake for which he could apologize nor show any regret. He took the only possible course and turned his attention to the animals, carefully blind to the signs of pain.

"It's a fact, really, Miss Armscote. I'll bring the photographs if you will let me, and you shall see them for yourself," he said.

"What kind of camera have you got?" she asked, quickly recovering herself.

"I have two or three at the hotel. One of them is fitted with a telescopic lens—you know the sort of thing, don't you?—it is like taking a picture through a telescope. It's simply wonderful what you get with it. I took some jackals the other day beyond the Pykara Falls, and when I developed the plate what do you think I found?"

"That they were jungle sheep or sambur."

"Not a bit of it; they were jacks right enough, but there was a leopard half hidden in a bit of jungle close by stalking the jackals. I had no notion the brute was there —nor had the jacks apparently, for they were playing about just like dogs. I could barely make them out. In the picture they look as if they were only twenty yards off."

"Do bring the photographs and let me see them. Look at Tiglath Pileser. I think he must be hungry."

She opened the door of the leopard cub's den.

"Tiglath Pileser! what a name!"

"Don't you think it is rather good?"

"Never heard it before that I can recollect."

"Not in church? Now you have given yourself away, haven't you?"

"Have I? Oh! of course! He was an Assyrian Johnnie noted for his bullying of the Jews. How did you get this little beast?"

"His mother was killed in a trap. Who set the trap I don't know; but the poor thing must have suffered agony before it died. Houssain told me that the cub was growling and crying by her side. He brought it home, knowing that I would give it shelter."

"Houssain seems almost as soft-hearted as you about animals."

"He centres his affections on a grey monkey, which he loves as if it were his child. I've grown very fond of it too. It has been with us longer than any other of my pets."

She entered Tiglath Pileser's den. The cub instantly retreated to the furthest corner and took up an aggressive attitude towards his benefactress. "Touch me if you dare!" he plainly said to the intruders. Nonia lifted him up in spite of certain feline threatenings, and passed her hand caressingly over the thick fur round the neck.

"Ungrateful little brute!" said Warborough. "Take care he doesn't scratch. Look at his claws. They are already larger than any cat's."

"He is hungry and wants his milk. I wonder where Houssain is?"

To Warborough's relief she put the cub down, and they went outside to search for the keeper of the Zoo. He was nowhere to be seen. A lanky boy of fifteen in Muhammadan dress issued from the back verandah of the house and ran up the steps cut in the bank. He carried a large feeding bottle.

"The tiger's dinner, lady," he said in English. "Houssain gave order to feed when the sun touched the top of the trees in the west."

"Where is Houssain?"

"Gone to walk up the hill."

"He has taken Teddy," she remarked, glancing towards a large empty kennel with a chain attached to a strong post close to it.

"Yes, lady; the bear walking too. Houssain plenty talking to Teddy for rudeness to this master."

"Is he going to talk with a stick?" asked Warborough, his eyes upon the boy.

"Houssain never beats, sahib. He has other ways of speaking," Abdul replied, meeting the glance steadily.

"He manages animals wonderfully without hurting them in the least," said Nonia. "I have never found a wound or bruise on any beast he has handled. They seem to know by his touch that they must submit. Did you find the porcupine, Abdul?"

"No, lady; he done run away, carrying lame leg like basket, and nicely marching on other three legs."

"Where did you meet Houssain?" asked Warborough.

"My guardian, Colonel Tredmere, found him for me.

Houssain was in his old regiment. He served as the Colonel's orderly. I believe he is a west coast Muhammadan."

"A Moplah, probably, which would account for his skill with the jungle beasts. Professes to understand their language, doesn't he?"

She turned to Abdul, who stood by her side awaiting her order to feed the cub.

"What do you think, Abdul? Does Houssain understand what the leopards and bears say?"

"Yes, lady; he knows all their talk; and what the kites say up in the clouds, and what the monkeys speak in the trees, and what the tigers want when they growl among the bamboos. He knows the talk of the trees when the wind beats them, and the talk of the frogs, and the small cry of the poochees in the grass."

"What is their talk?" asked Warborough, not a muscle relaxed in his serious face.

The boy cast a swift glance at his questioner, and gaining confidence at what he saw there, he replied.

"In the morning it is about food and water. When the sun is high it is sleepy talk, and by-and-by they tell news, the birds what they see and the beasts what they smell, and the trees what they hear from the wind."

"What does the wind talk about?"

"It tells where the clouds are hiding, and when the rain will come, and the flowers tell when the sun will shine. Jungle plenty talking, sahib, same like people in the bazaar. Baby Tiger asking dinner, lady; shall I give milk?"

CHAPTER III

Warborough glanced at Nonia, prepared for a smile of amusement; her face was as serious as his when he listened to Abdul's tale of the forest folk.

"Now you understand why Houssain loves the jungle. He has taught me to love it too." She turned towards the mountain that reared its forest-covered slopes behind the house. "It is because I love the jungle and all that it contains that I cannot tolerate the man who shoots and traps and kills."

"Some animals have to be killed, you know," he protested. "The tiger and leopard that go for the villagers' cattle must be destroyed." She laughed as she made a little movement as though to escape from the corner into which she was driven, and he continued. "Tiglath Pileser will one day want that nice young buffalo for his birthday dinner; and if you give him the chance he will take it."

"Tiglath Pileser is going to be brought up properly. When the village cows are about he will look the other way."

"Oh! will he? You will teach him to 'trust,' I suppose, when he sees a goat or a heifer, until you say 'Paid for!' I'll tell you what to do. Make him a vegetarian, and there you are! Cattle, pigs, fowls, dogs, and village babies will all be perfectly safe."

"Oh! don't be ridiculous!" she said, laughing again in spite of her effort to be serious. "Look here! really

and truly! don't you think that if animals have to be killed it ought to be done kindly, and not as sport?"

His face was perfectly grave, but his eyes twinkled with fun as he replied—

"I have another suggestion for you. Shall I help you to establish a lethal chamber for the bloodthirsty beasts that won't 'trust' when they smell cattle? Houssain shall invent some way of decoying them in. By-the-bye, does the old man ever have an urgent telegram calling him to the bed of a dying grandmother when you ask him to do these sort of things?"

She turned away in pretended wrath. "Do be serious, Captain Warborough, and don't talk any more of killing or dying. I suppose I'm idiotic on the subject. I always had a horror of death of all kinds. I can't even bear to see a tree cut down. Have you ever been near a large tree that is being felled?"

"Not lately. As a boy I used to watch the wood-cutters at work in my father's coverts as they lopped off branches and cut away saplings. I don't remember having any sentiment about it. On the contrary, I believe I used to yell with delight when an extra big branch came down. Boys are such heartless little wretches. They begin by killing flies and end by shooting tigers."

"That's because they are not taught better."

"It is never too late to learn. I shall be very glad to put myself under instruction if you will teach me. I can begin by helping you with Tiglath Pileser and—and—I might learn how to use the axe without hurting the trees if you will show me."

"Captain Warborough!—— I won't talk to you any more!"

She moved away, and he followed her quickly. "I'm so sorry," he said penitently. "Do tell me about the trees.

We shan't quarrel over those, I am sure, because I have no desire—I never had—to cut any down. It's awfully hard work, and I hate work of any sort—— "

" I'm sure you don't ! " she interrupted, looking at his well-knit sinewy figure, that could only have been built up by physical activity.

" Tell me about the trees."

" Once upon a time," she began, relenting, " there was an elm tree that I loved—— "

" Glad it wasn't a wild beast or a horrid sportsman ! "

" Now, if you interrupt me again I shall tell you nothing." He made a gesture of obedience, and she went on. " I used to sit under it and watch the birds and insects. The wind came whispering through the leaves in summer, but in winter the wind sang a very different song as it scolded and moaned through the bare branches. One morning I found three men with axes, and they were hacking at the poor thing's feet. They cut until they came to its very heart. Then it swayed and tottered and fell over on its side with a sharp crash that sounded to me like a death cry. It lay quivering in every limb and leaf. The beautiful tree that had taken nature more than two hundred years to make was suddenly thrown down and killed. What could I do but run home and cry ! "

" I am afraid you let a great deal of pity, to say nothing of tears, run to waste," he said softly.

" Now, when a tree dies in the forest it dies nobly and impressively. Have you ever seen a tree come down without axe and rope ? "

" In a gale I have ; more than once. I was within an ace of being smashed up by one under which I was sheltering."

" I mean in a dead calm. It rarely happens in England, where woodcutters are always on the look-out ; but here,

where we have no woodmen, a great tree falls occasionally by itself for no other reason than ripe old age."

"Ever seen one come down?" he asked, watching her face with its constant change of expression as she told her tale. He could have listened contentedly until the tropical sky was studded with stars.

"Yes; it was on the Droog. You know, don't you? that I often make excursions into the jungle with Houssain. I ride and he walks. We take the syce and a coolie to carry the lunch and help if the path wants clearing. About two months ago—before you came up to the hills—we went to the top of the Droog."

She looked across Coonoor at the mountain shrouded in deep purple shade as the sun dropped towards the western horizon.

"The great stones still remain which were said to have been taken up by Haider Ali's orders for the building of a fort. He carried out his design; the fort was built, and some Englishmen were imprisoned there. Others he is said to have thrown over the precipices into the forest below to be eaten by wild beasts."

"Nasty trick, that," commented Warborough. "Wouldn't give a fellow much chance of escape."

"It won't bear thinking about," she replied with a shudder. "I found it bad enough just trying to realize the life that those poor prisoners led. It must have been so hopeless, so lonely. The clouds gathered round us soon after we arrived at the top. I didn't mind, but I could see that Houssain didn't like it at all. He was afraid we shouldn't get back that evening. Have you ever been up the Droog?"

"Not yet; I hope to go before long. I want to see that old fort. Is it inhabited?"

"Rather not! Only the foundations remain. Even

if there was a building, it would be difficult to get up supplies except at an enormous expense ; and the streams would be simply poison with all that jungle about."

"Tell me about the tree."

"The forest on the Droog is primeval ; it has never been felled nor burned. The trees are of all ages, from the young sapling to the giant veteran. As I sat there on one of the blocks of masonry that had fallen out of position—the old Mahratta builders used no mortar—the mist dropped suddenly between the huge moss-green trunks like soft curtains of chiffon, and with it came a curious living silence that suggested an animate watchfulness in inanimate things. Houssain and the other two came close to where I was. They were as still as the forest ; it seemed as if they were watching the trees and the trees were watching them through the mist."

"I know ; I've felt it myself ; it's quite uncanny," said Warborough.

"Perhaps the trees knew what was going to happen, and were waiting for it, as we might wait at the side of a dying bed watching for the last flicker. Presently the folds of mist melted away into nothingness. The trees stood out distinctly, great and small, as still as the rock on which the foundations of the fort were laid. Every leaf was wide awake and as alert as we were. In front of me at a little distance was an enormous grey-stemmed giant. It's trunk was like the column of an old cathedral, rising eighty feet without a break. The branches, thickly hung with long fringes of old-man's-beard, spread out from the same point. In its prime it must have carried a magnificent head of foliage ; but now it had very few leaves ; so many of its branches were dead."

"Magnificent old veteran ! It must have looked on when Haider was building his fort."

"Yes! and heard the voices of the Englishmen! I hadn't thought of that! There wasn't a breath of wind. Suddenly I heard a curious muffled sound as of something being ground and crushed; not a sharp crack, such as the elm gave when its heart was torn in two, but a gentle groaning like the moan of some tired creature that has lived its life and spent its strength and is ready to drop out of the ranks."

"Weren't you frightened?" he asked as she paused.

"Not in the least. It was all so natural. The tree sank back into the arms of its children, the younger generation growing round it. I thought they would have been broken down, but they stood firm, though they were shaken a little as they felt the weight. A few twigs and bits of bark dropped. Not a limb was broken and scarcely a leaf was torn. It was a royal death, nothing less. If you go to the top of the Droog you will see the tree not far from the edge of the jungle. I wonder if it has dropped to the ground yet?"

"The next monsoon will bring it down if it hasn't fallen. I'll come and tell you after I've been up," he said. "Where did you get that young buffalo? It's one of the hill sort, isn't it?"

"Yes; a Toda buffalo. I bought it from a Toda boy who was forcing it along a rough hill-path when it was too weak to move. I've named it Basan, and the goat Capers."

While they talked Abdul had been busy. He had satisfied Tiglath Pileser; given fodder to the jungle sheep and a large piece of meat to the melancholy kite; some boiled gram to the buffalo and a bunch of green leaves to the goat. He came up to Nonia and stood at attention making a military salute which had been taught by Houssain.

"Done feed all missie's brutes. Bear's food got in the verandah."

"What do you give Teddy?" asked Warborough.

"Boiled rice sweetened with native treacle. He loves sugar."

They moved down the steps; as they approached the back of the bungalow, two dogs came out, followed by a grey figure, which ran towards Nonia with an inarticulate murmur of pleasure; and a black hand with a hairy arm took hold of her skirt.

"Pishasha, where is your master? And why haven't you gone with him?" she asked kindly, as she patted the monkey on its head. "This is the only animal on the premises that I can't call my own. I think I love it better than all the rest; perhaps because it has been with us longest."

"You said it was Houssain's."

"Yes; he has a peculiar fancy for grey monkeys. When he first came he had one very like this. Something strange happened, and he had to get rid of it. A week later he brought this one home. It was a very dark brown when it came, but it has grown lighter and of a grey colour like the other."

Having greeted his mistress, Pishasha returned to the verandah. He took up a stick that was pointed at one end and began jabbing at a large gourd. Warborough watched him at work.

"Clever little beggar! He holds the bit of stick just like a dagger, and is sticking the gourd for all the world as if he wanted to kill it. I wonder how he learned to do that?"

"A monkey wouldn't want any teaching. Pishasha has a reason for stabbing the gourd—a good one, too. He wants to get at the seeds. Look! his arm is through the hole! Here he comes to give me some of his treasure."

Pishasha darted out of his corner and was again at Nonia's side, his cheeks and paws full of the seeds. The

servants standing in the verandah looked on ; the monkey was a favourite with them. Warborough was thinking that it was high time he took his departure ; his visit had already extended far beyond the usual limit of an afternoon call ; yet he lingered.

Suddenly from the distant forest high up on the mountain side came the sound of a harsh cry, hideous in its discordancy. It startled all alike.

" What is it ? " asked Warborough.

There was no immediate response. Nonia listened in silence. The monkey cowered by her side and drew the fold of her skirt over its face, letting the seeds of the gourd fall to the ground. The servants stood perfectly still as though their ears were alert for more. The two dogs that had come to welcome their mistress put their tails between their legs and retired into the house. The hoofs of the jungle sheep could be heard rattling against the sides of its prison house as it sought to escape. Again the sound was repeated.

" It is like some one being murdered. I never heard such a fiendish noise. Do you know what it is ? " he asked again.

" No, I don't think I do. I've heard it before. The servants say that it is a white devil. There's a tradition among the hillmen that white devils are to be seen among the rocks in some of the lonely ravines. They are giants, and they guard treasure."

" What's Houssain's opinion ? He ought to know the sound of every animal on the Nilgiris and Western Ghats ; and being a Mussalman should have little fear of Hindu devils."

" He has never happened to hear it. I have described it, and he says it must be a hyæna. Now and then we have one wandering over the hills looking for a stray jackal or

a jungle sheep. He says he has seen tracks in the direction of Dodabetta, between Kotagiri and Ootacamund."

The behaviour of the monkey and of the other animals, including the dogs, had not escaped Warborough's notice.

"Your beasts recognise the sound; they know something more about it than we do; they're afraid."

"Do you think so? It looks like it in Pishasha's case," she replied, glancing down at the trembling monkey at her side.

After that second cry there was silence. The sun was sinking behind the hills, and Warborough made a move to go. She strolled by his side as he walked towards the gate. Unconsciously they both lingered on the way.

"Did you say that there was no village beyond the sholah?" he asked, as they stopped at the gate.

"Not over there," she said, nodding her head towards the hill from which the cry had come.

"You know the country round about thoroughly?"

"Thanks to good old Houssain, I know it better than most people, though I shouldn't say that my knowledge was thorough. There are lots of places I haven't explored."

"I've been doing a few sketch-maps of the country round Coonoor and Ooty. I should like to show them to you. You might give me some hints, as you have been here longer than I have."

"On one condition; that you don't use the information I give you to hunt the forest creatures. They are under my protection, and I love them all as if they were my own."

"Including the tigers, of course?"

"We have none down here. You must go the other side of Ooty to find tigers."

"What about the hyæna? Am I to consider it as one of your beasts, and allow it to corner me like Teddy?"

"It's a stranger and an intruder. I'll give you leave to fire a shot over its head to frighten it away—that is to say if you ever come across it. No one has ever seen it, and Major Berringham declares that it doesn't exist."

He unchained the gate. "You ought to put up a notice 'Beware of the beasts.'"

"Or 'No callers,'" she amended, laughing.

He held out his hand and retained hers a little longer than was necessary. There was also that in his eyes which supplemented the grip. With a catch in her breath she withdrew her hand and busied herself over the readjustment of the chain.

"I must make the gate secure or Teddy may try to follow you home. From his behaviour to-day I think he has taken a great fancy to you. You wouldn't break his heart by refusing his devotion. Poor Teddy! I am afraid it's a case of misplaced affection."

"Rather a terrible fate for a beast as well as a man," he rejoined.

"And for a woman," she added involuntarily.

Her eyes fell before his, and in their depths he read a sudden fear which he could not understand. She turned from him abruptly with a hurried good-bye. As he walked down the hill towards Coonoor it haunted him. He could not help puzzling over one or two incidents that had happened during his call, particularly the lurking fear in Nonia's eyes. It seemed ever ready to spring up; and for some unaccountable reason it formed a barrier, checking their fast ripening friendship.

* * * * *

An hour later Houssain returned with a very subdued

and obedient Teddy bear. Teddy bore no bruise from unkind blows. His leader had not touched him. He had talked to him seriously during the walk in his own fashion, and there the matter had ended. Teddy was not likely to forget it even in the enjoyment of his supper of sweetened rice.

CHAPTER IV

Coonoor is the most perfect hill station in India; easily reached by rail; an equable climate, with no extremes of heat or cold; comfortable houses, good roads, beautiful flowers and magnificent scenery. It is not a difficult matter for human nature to be content in such a place; and residents as well as visitors feel the glamour of the peaceful backwater. Only twelve miles further up the hills lies Ootacamund, where the Governor of Madras and his staff are in constant evidence for five months of the year. There the presence of the "House Party" gives a brilliancy and impetus to social functions never to be found at Coonoor, for which the sociable little station is truly grateful in its secret heart.

Only two miles distant is the military station of Wellington, where a regiment and details from other garrisons are quartered.

Coonoor has its club, its library and public rooms; Wellington its racecourse and gymkhana ground. Between the two stations there is always something going on in the way of sport and amusement—polo, golf, dances, theatricals, and games.

When Miss Madersfield and Nonia Armscote appeared on the scenes with Colonel Tredmere some two years previous to Warborough's visit, conjecture placed them among the visitors—an aunt and niece with sufficient money to

live comfortably. It seemed quite natural that they should prefer the climate of the Indian hills to the fogs of England. As soon as they were settled the colonel bade them good-bye, and returned to his club in London. It could not be discovered that they were connected with any other Anglo-Indian family, past or present. Colonel Tredmere's name, however, was all the introduction they needed; and in accordance with the custom of the place they paid calls and joined in the amusements. Nonia did not play tennis, nor did she care for golf. She preferred to ride or walk, accompanied only by the syce and Houssain. The most persistent of inquirers had been unable to find any other reason for their choice of the hills than a natural preference for a sunny climate.

Chamra House, the bungalow taken by Tredmere, was on the outskirts of Coonoor in the direction of Kotagiri. The ground was considerably higher than some of the older inhabited parts and possessed a bracing climate equal to that of Wellington. Virgin forest and wild uncultivated hills surrounded the premises on three sides. On the fourth, between the garden and the grounds belonging to their nearest neighbour, there was a broad stretch of rough country overgrown with low jungle.

Nonia kept a couple of ponies; one to ride, the other to drive. Miss Madersfield's conveyance was a rickshaw. It left her independent of horseflesh, and free to make her engagements as she pleased, without consulting Nonia. If it had not been for this, the elder lady would have found Chamra House dull and depressing. She was frequently to be seen at the club and in the reading-room, and was always ready for a chat. Those who hoped to extract information from her were usually disappointed, owing to her habit of never answering a question directly. Words flowed from her lips, and news of a sort might be gathered

as she talked; but it was never the particular information that was desired.

"Where is Nonia this evening?" asked Mrs. Honington, meeting Miss Madersfield a couple of days after Warborough's unpremeditated call.

"I don't know! I have no patience with her! always tearing about on her pony and out all day in the hot sun! It is very trying to the lungs, whether one is walking or riding, to be running up hill and down dale continually. I feel it myself in the small amount of exercise that I take. Ever since I was a child I have had a delicate chest, and whenever I attempt to walk uphill I lose my breath entirely."

"The elevation has something to do with loss of breath," was the reply. "I suppose Nonia is quite strong. Is she like her father or her mother?"

"The girls of the present day are a new product, as unlike their parents as they can be," said Miss Madersfield. "I put it down to the queer marriages that have taken place. New-fashioned methods of education have had something to do with it. As soon as a girl gets into the twenties she takes up one thing or another and runs it violently, and calls it a Cause. She arranges meetings and sends out invitations to all her friends."

"You need not go unless you like," remarked Mrs. Cotheridge.

"If I have nothing else to do I rather like going. You get tea and chat. Oh yes; I always join everything and pay the little subscriptions. I belong to the suffragettes and the suffragists and the anti-suffragettes because I like to hear both sides of the question—the antevivisection society and the National Service League. It is difficult to remember which is which; but it doesn't matter, because they are all spoken of as the Cause."

Mrs. Cotheridge and Mrs. Honington had both heard

about Causes from their own daughters, who each had a separate one of her own. Just at that moment Mrs. Honington was interested to find out how Nonia spent her time, and whether she was likely to be attracted by a certain Major Berringham. She brought the conversation round to the point by asking if Nonia had taken up any special Cause.

"I think the love of animals—to say nothing of reptiles—may be carried too far. One day just before we sailed for India I was walking with Nonia in London. She saw a dog shivering on a doorstep. She rang the bell and asked why the servant was so unkind as to leave the poor animal out in the cold. The girl said it wasn't their dog. Just then the dog belonging to the house came rushing out, a nasty aggressive Irish terrier. It went for the other, and there was a terrible row. The owner of the dog on the doorstep was calling next door. She heard the tow-row, and came to the assistance of her pet. There was really an awful scene. I walked off and pretended to be a stranger."

"The best thing you could do under the circumstances," said Mrs. Honington, sympathetically. "Does Nonia ride out in the Wellington direction?"

"The country all round about Wellington is overrun with soldiers. They may have been steady, respectable men in civil life before they enlisted, but in uniform, whether kharki or scarlet, they have a swaggering appearance which would keep me away from any place where they were likely to be met."

"Nonia doesn't mind them, I dare say. It is very good riding ground, I am told, in the Dodabetta direction, the other side of Wellington."

"I think the way the regiment goes about firing blank cartridges just anyhow between Wellington and Dodabetta

is really dreadful. It makes riding or walking most unsafe. Who knows whether a ramrod may not be left in a gun by a careless young fellow; and a ramrod is almost as dangerous as a bullet."

"They don't use ramrods nowadays," gently corrected Mrs. Honington. "There is no danger from either the rifles or the men. It must be rather pleasant to see the manœuvres with the whole regiment out."

"Nonia is a very strange girl. She is very fond of animals and is always going into raptures over their beauty. I can't see any beauty in a clumsy ill-mannered bear, or a blood-sucker without a tail, or even with a tail for the matter of that. She even admires the soldiers, and sometimes she can't say enough in praise of a hillman with his long springing walk, which never varies, whether he is going up or down hill. I never know what next she will bring home to pet and nurse."

"Very trying for you, I am sure."

"—with my weak nerves," added Miss Madersfield, as she rose to depart.

The distance between her house and the club necessitated an early start. The road being uphill, it took the rickshaw coolies twice as long to return home as to reach the club. After she had disappeared Mrs. Honington drew her chair nearer to her companion and lowered her voice as she made the next remark.

"Miss Madersfield is the most tiresome person to talk to that I know. It is like picking up empty husks under a chestnut tree."

"What were you trying to find out? How Nonia spent her time?"

"Oh! nothing? nothing! I should have been interested to hear what a girl of that kind with no occupation did with herself all day. She can't be in the saddle from

morning to night. I might as well have tried to extract information from a punkah-wheel."

Mrs. Cotheridge accepted the disclaimer, although she was well aware of what her friend was fishing for. Major Berringham was one of the few eligible men on the hills and the owner of a motor-car, a fact that told a plain tale of private means.

"Is Nonia her niece?" asked Mrs. Cotheridge.

"I believe so; she leaves one to infer it."

"From something that Nonia let drop herself I was under the impression that there was no relationship. There is no family likeness between the two."

"Anyway, Nonia is said to be Colonel Tredmere's niece. Did you ever meet him?" asked Mrs. Honington.

"Years ago I knew him at Bangalore. He was commanding the regiment. It was disbanded soon after he retired."

"And Nonia's mother must have been his sister. If you come to think of it, Miss Madersfield can't be her aunt, for Colonel Tredmere was never married."

"So we have understood," said Mrs. Cotheridge.

"He always posed as a bachelor; but Mrs. Ravenscourt told me that she believed Nonia was his daughter."

"His daughter! Well, why not?" rejoined Mrs. Cotheridge, who, to do her justice, was not a scandal-monger. "It is quite likely, and would account for many little things that are not very clear at present. If a man makes an unhappy marriage, he often keeps the fact of his marriage to himself, and I don't blame him."

"Daughter or niece, it is said that he means to leave her all his money."

"In that case a man might go further and fare worse, for Nonia is a nice girl and good-looking into the bargain.

I've heard that she has money of her own, and is not dependent on Colonel Tredmere."

"Very possibly; but whether that is so or not, Maud says she is always pleasant to her, and very good-natured," added Mrs. Honington, remembering the diamonds which were to be lent to Maud.

Major Hugh Berringham, of the regiment stationed at Wellington, was at that moment under the same roof, seated in a lounge in the smoking-room. He had been indulging in a leisurely course of cigarettes and had skimmed the English papers which had arrived that day; had chatted with three or four men he knew, and made the acquaintance of two new arrivals.

He was popular with everybody, friendly in manner and inclined to be sociable if it gave him little or no trouble. He possessed an easy temper, and was never heard to say an ill word of any one. The rank and file of the regiment liked him too, though they did not consider him a particularly smart officer. He was good enough in their opinion to keep the men up to the mark without any unnecessary worry.

Having finished the number of cigarettes he allowed himself before dinner, he prepared to leave, moving without haste as he rose from his comfortable chair. At the same time Warborough, who had turned up late at the club, threw down the paper in which he had been absorbed and got up. He was not a smoker, but he had chosen the smoking-room because he only met his own sex there, and could easily avoid conversation, for which he was not then inclined. He joined Berringham, and they passed out together with a nod here and there as a familiar eye was caught, and went into the verandah.

Mrs. Cotheridge, with other visitors, was departing at the same time. On catching sight of Berringham, she

detached herself from her companions and placed herself in his path, stopping him as well as Warborough, who was close at his heels.

"Major Berringham, I want to tell you something. It is something that you ought to know," she said, fixing him with her eye.

"Indeed, Mrs. Cotheridge! You are not going to say that I am to be excluded from the ball?" he replied, with an expression of alarm that he was far from feeling.

"No, no! You will get your invitation all right. The girls are busy at a committee meeting at Wellington this afternoon, making out the list of guests."

He heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank heaven for great mercies as well as small——"

"I wanted to tell you something about the regiment," she continued hastily and taking no notice of his fun.

At the mention of the regiment Berringham's face altered. Warborough made an attempt to escape, but he was hemmed in by a group of large cane lounges which could not be pushed aside without endangering the limbs of the crowd preparing to leave the club.

"In what respect has the regiment been guilty of offence?" he asked in an altered tone.

"My daughters were driving up the Kotagiri road a few evenings ago, and they met four of your men. Two of them were the worse for drink. The other two were just sober enough to help their companions home."

"Are you quite sure that your daughters were not mistaken?" he asked gravely.

"Quite; there could be no doubt about the state of the men."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cotheridge, for telling me," said Berringham in his politest manner.

"I thought it only right that you or the colonel should know."

"Very good of you to think of it. It shall be inquired into at once. Good night. I must be off, as I have to pick up some of our fellows on the way."

Mrs. Cotheridge took the hint, and finding that her carriage had not come, retired to the drawing-room to wait for it. Berringham anathamatized her under his breath.

"Women's eyes are the very deuce!" he said as he went down the club steps.

"They must have been mistaken," remarked Warborough.

"That's the very mischief of it! They were right. The men were all four drunk, and got into trouble for it. Where the deuce they get the stuff is what puzzles us."

"Canteen, of course," said his companion, his features devoid of expression.

"No; we have proof that they don't get it from the canteen."

"Coonoor bazaar?"

"We've got watchers there. I think every arrack shop is under police supervision."

"Perhaps they go to the new settlement round the cordite factory."

"All under close police surveillance too. No; it is from some other source, though I can't tell you what."

He glanced at his companion and noticed the stolid look that said plainly he had no other suggestion to offer. Berringham beckoned to his chauffeur, who, with lamps lighted, was waiting for the signal, and the car drew up close to where the two men were standing.

"We have our suspicions," continued Berringham. "The thing has got to be stopped, and I can tell you that the colonel is not taking forty winks over it. He has

stirred up the police at headquarters and asked for a commission of inquiry. I told him that he would have to write reams before he would get anything but a polite reply on official paper to the effect that they had had the honour to receive his letter."

"Is it in the hands of the police here?"

"Oh yes; Lutterworth's men are on the watch. But they have a heap of criminal work among the natives. His constables are natives and the inspectors mostly Eurasian. What we want is a European, who might be assisted by some sort of detective, also English; they would be able to get something out of our men themselves. In these days, however, when every department is so short-handed, we are not likely to have our request granted."

Berringham got into the car and closed the door with a bang. The chauffeur, who had sat like a blind and deaf image of stone at his wheel, came to life at the command to drive on, and started the car forward.

Warborough stepped out into the compound. The last glow of crimson and orange was gone, and the sky was studded with stars. His servant was waiting for him with a lantern, ready to light him home under the gum trees that cast a deep shade over the road.

Mrs. Cotheridge was still inquiring for her pony-carriage; it seemed likely that she would be left alone in the deserted club to wait indefinitely. Seeing Warborough on foot, she hurried after him.

"May I walk home with you?" she asked; and without waiting for a reply she continued, "Thank you so much. You will pass my gate on the way to your hotel. The carriage is not here. I suppose my daughters haven't been able to get away from their meeting yet."

She gave him no opportunity of responding, and went on pouring out remarks as she followed the lantern. He

was quite content to listen. Although he might be able to chaff a girl like Nonia when no one was present, he was a man of few words where ordinary acquaintances were concerned.

"You heard what I said to Major Berringham. It is rather sad the way the men have taken to drink since they have been at Wellington. They came with an excellent character, but the number of men who have been seen about lately the worse for liquor is quite alarming. It makes it most unpleasant for our girls to be riding and driving about by themselves."

"Yes," assented her companion, with no more interest than common civility demanded.

"A man when he has had too much beer to drink is stupid and helpless; but when he takes arrack he is no better than a lunatic."

"Yes," acquiesced Warborough.

"I can't help thinking that these men have had arrack and not beer. Where do you suppose they get it?" she demanded, glancing up into his face by the dim light of the lantern. She could distinguish nothing but the blank expression he so often wore. It gave no more promise of elucidation to Mrs. Cotheridge than it did to Major Berringham. All the same, she waited to hear what he had to say, and he felt obliged to give some sort of an answer.

"Perhaps they buy it in the bazaar—if they don't get it in the canteen."

"Arrack is not sold in the canteen. I know that much. I also know that a man, whether English or Indian, can get horribly drunk for twopence if he takes arrack, and for another small sum he can get enough opium or hemp to make him dangerously mad. You know all about it, of course."

"Yes; I have always understood that it was so," was the reply.

"You have never had anything to do with a large body of idle men like a regiment. It is astonishing how much mischief they can get into. I've heard my husband say that when he was with his regiment, before he was seconded for special duty, that he disliked going to one of these dull stations where there was nothing much to occupy the men, and that it was very bad for them. I think he would have preferred active service with all its hardships."

"I don't think I should go quite as far as that," said Warborough.

"You like your engineering work better than being with a regiment?"

"Er—yes," he replied, with the embarrassment of the modern man who has a personal question put to him unexpectedly. To divert her curiosity from himself he said with a ray of momentary interest, "Where did you say your daughters met the men?"

"On the Kotagiri road. They were coming down towards Wellington. I suppose you have the usual three months' leave?" said Mrs. Cotheridge, who was tired of the unpleasant subject of the soldiers and their excesses.

"I may be here more than three months, or possibly less. I haven't made up my mind."

It was as well that he could not see in the dim light the slight scornful turn of the lip as she listened to his answer. She was questioning within herself whether he had any mind to make up. She failed to see that he was one of the products of the modern public school. By a wholesome process of snubbing he had learned not to express a half-formed opinion. Until the opinion was formed his mind was to all appearances a blank. The will remained sound and intact. Action came only after careful consideration

and a balancing of the odds. Then the will being set in motion revealed a backbone of obstinacy and dogged perseverance which in Warborough's case wrested success from the unwilling hand of the goddess of fortune more often than not. He was made of the stuff that has given England her soldiers and sailors, her police and her firemen, and the vast army of empire-builders in her colonies.

CHAPTER V

"Good night, Captain Warborough; thank you so much for letting me have the help of your lantern. I should have been kept waiting a long time if you hadn't befriended me."

She thrust out a hand at him; he felt his own taken, held up and forcibly put back immediately as though it were a book being restored to its shelf. Mrs. Cotheridge turned into the gateway of the house she had rented for herself and her daughters for the season.

"Wooden-headed creature!" was her comment as she stepped warily along the garden path lest she should tread upon a snake. "Unless he has something else substantial to recommend him besides his pay, he is not worth another thought."

At dinner her daughters were profuse in their regrets at having failed to call for her.

"Who brought you home?" asked Pansy.

"Captain Warborough; he was walking and had his man with a lantern. You were very late. Were you at the committee all the time?"

"Every minute of it; ever since half-past five. Things went smoothly till we came to the list of guests. Then Mrs. Oswald began to use her blue pencil. There was no real trouble till we got to the men."

"What was the bone of contention?"

"Whether Mr. Pensax should be invited or not."

"What would you have said, mother?" asked Ivy.

"I should have wanted to know something more about him before I gave an opinion. Who brought his name up as a guest?"

"Maud Honington. It seems that she and her mother have taken a fancy to him."

"He's awfully good-looking," interpolated Ivy. "I don't see why he should be left out."

"How did Mrs. Honington come to know him?" asked Mrs. Cotheridge.

"Maud met him at the railway station, and he helped her to find a parcel that was missing. He happened to be inquiring about some goods that he had ordered up for himself. Before she drove away he asked if he might call."

"What a queer thing to ask! If he is anybody at all of course he might call round. I am sure no one can accuse Coonoor of being exclusive; it's the most sociable place in the world," said Mrs. Cotheridge, who loved the little hill station, and came up year after year in the hot season to spend five happy months.

"That was exactly what Mrs. Oswald said. She wanted to know whether he was in the military or civil service?"

"Could Maud tell her?" inquired Mrs. Cotheridge, with a curiosity excusable in the mother of two nice girls.

"She said he was up here on survey duty. That was how Maud put it. 'Government survey?' asked Mrs. Oswald. 'No; he is working for a company,' said Maud, as if she knew all about it. 'Prospecting!' Mrs. Oswald suggested."

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed Ivy, her eyes twinkling with amusement. "You should have seen Mrs. Oswald

turn those large grey eyes of hers on Maud! 'Truth-finders' I call them! She had to confess all she knew and all she didn't know. I am glad that Mrs. Oswald is not my old Mum. I shouldn't have a rag of a secret left if she were, and life wouldn't be worth living!"

Mrs. Cotheridge smiled as she replied, "I am sure Mrs. Oswald would not enjoy being made the dumping ground for your confidences, Ivy!" at which there was a laugh, for it was well known in the family that Ivy's confidences usually consisted of an expression of enthusiastic admiration for some member of the opposite sex. "Well, Pansy, what else happened?"

"Maud said that she believed he was prospecting for gold and mica. There seemed to be an idea of re-opening some old workings on the Nilgiris. Mrs. Oswald listened, though she was dying to get on with the lists; and when Maud had finished she said, 'Oh! I dare say it's all right; but I think—don't you?—that we ought to give him the opportunity of calling on us first. It would put him in such a very awkward position if he had decided not to call.' She began to read out the names on Mrs. Gresham's list as if the matter ended there; but Maud had no intention of letting it drop. She said that he was staying at the Glenview Hotel, and had brought up a perfectly beautiful horse and—and that he was awfully nice all round. Mrs Oswald was quite pleasant, but not to be moved an inch. She just mildly remarked that a beautiful horse and charming manners were a recommendation and the right thing. 'But I think—don't you?—that we must wait till Mr. Pensax calls.'"

Again Ivy laughed as she broke into the conversation.

"You should have heard her diffidence and sort of I-defer-to-you tone when she said 'I think, don't you?' All the time we knew she was adamant. Give me the old

Mum with her 'No, Ivy; *no*, dear; NO! I can't have it!' and there would be some hope of getting one's way in the end!"

Mrs. Cotheridge joined in the laugh against herself, and then asked how Maud took it.

"She looked just a little annoyed for a half-minute; then as Mrs. Oswald turned once more to Mrs. Gresham—who is rather deaf, you know, and can't hear unless you raise your voice—she decided to let it drop. There really wasn't a chance of further discussion until the lists were finished."

"Had Mrs. Gresham anything to say on the subject?"

"She hadn't heard half the conversation; and I don't think she was interested in anything but the list of people she had made. Her list might have been all right thirty years ago, but it was impossible in the present day."

"What do you think, mother!" said Ivy. "The good old thing had put down all the Governor's staff at Ooty."

"I don't see why some of them shouldn't be asked," said Mrs. Cotheridge, who approved of Aides as a class.

"Out of the question!" replied Pansy. "They are dears, the whole lot of them from the Governor downwards; but we must draw the line somewhere. After all the club rooms have their limitations; and if everybody belonging to Coonoor and Wellington turns up it will be a crush as it is. Besides, if we once begin with Ooty where are we to stop? We can't invite the A.D.C.'s and leave out the visitors; and if the visitors have invitations it would be simply deadly to omit the residents. The journey is nothing nowadays in a motor-car, and they'd come crowding down in their thousands if they had the chance."

"Yes, mother, Pansy is quite right. Of course it

would be fun to have them all; but it can't be done. If invitations are sent to only half, the other half would be howling for the committee's blood."

"Then the invitations are to be confined to Wellington and Coonoor. Was Mrs. Gresham annoyed at the cutting-down of her list?"

"As soon as we could convince her of the impossibility she was as tame as a pet lamb; but it was twenty minutes before the dear old thing saw the necessity for the blue pencil. Then other names were considered and at last the list was finished. Mrs. Oswald rose to break up the meeting when Maud began again on the subject of Mr. Pensax. She said she hoped he was included, and that no difficulties would be raised because he didn't happen to be known to the committee."

Ivy laughed softly. "You should have seen the grey truth-finders! They bore down on Maud like the lamps of a motor-car rounding a corner. I should have been terrified if I had been Maud."

Pansy continued. "Mrs. Oswald said, 'I think, Miss Honington, that the general feeling is against inviting him at present. A card can be sent later on. As I have already pointed out, the fact that he has not called seems to show a desire on his part to be left out.' Maud rather startled us in her answer. 'I know for a fact that Mr. Pensax does wish for an invitation; he told me so himself; and what is more, I promised him one.'"

"What did Mrs. Oswald say to that?"

"She was quite as surprised as we were; but she took it very quietly, and put on her best smile, as if she was just going to ask Maud to dinner."

"I must cultivate that smile," said Ivy. "It's the sort of smile to wear when an old colonel asks you to dance and you have to say no, for the simple reason that you

don't want to make yourself ridiculous by playing about the ballroom in a mid-Victorian manner."

"My dear Ivy! the colonels out here are not old!" protested her mother. "They dance very well indeed! much better than a great many of the younger men. Your father was always considered a good dancer, and he has kept it up as you know."

"Oh! Dad does his level best I'll admit, and I'm proud of him. He wasn't born yesterday, and is aware of his limitations. He chooses a decent old-fashioned partner who doesn't mind dropping back into an obsolete style, and they don't disgrace themselves; the world doesn't expect anything better from them. But go on, Pansy. Mother is dying to hear if any sparks flew."

"Mrs. Oswald held out her hand to Maud, and said good night in her sweetest way, as if she were taking leave of her dearest friend. 'We will talk about Mr. Pensax at our next meeting, and perhaps by that time he may have made a few calls.'"

"Maud will tell him to call on Mrs. Oswald, and that will smooth out the creases. I am glad he is coming to the ball. I think he is quite the best-looking man I've seen," remarked Ivy in a confidential tone, as though she had imparted a great secret.

"So you said of Captain Warborough when he first appeared on the scenes," responded Pansy, frank and outspoken, as sisters—the best of friends—usually are.

"I remember your making that very same remark, my dear," said her mother, "when you were ten years old about a new doctor's assistant who was called in for your attack of measles."

"Oh! come, now, Mummy! your memory is not what it was! You're mixing things up horribly. It was my cousin Mary who fell in love with her doctor when she had

measles. That's family history as any one will tell you. Don't let this grow upon you or you will have to be sent home for a rest-cure, or a sun-bath-cure, or an open-air-cure ; and how shall we ever manage Dad without you ? "

* * * * *

Nonia and Miss Madersfield had dined. The evening was chilly, for white clouds had crept up from the valleys to meet the wisps and whorls of vapour coming down the hills, and it seemed probable that there would be rain in the night.

A bright fire of wood burned on the hearth, giving moderate warmth sufficient for the summer climate. It dried the air, and the room was pleasantly fumigated with the resinous eucalyptus logs that sputtered and crackled and burst into flames, leaping towards the chimney.

Coffee had been served in the drawing-room as they sat in the dim light cast by the shaded standard lamp and the flickering fire. Nonia was silent and inclined to dream, as was often the case. Miss Madersfield fidgeted with her coffee spoon, glancing at her companion frequently. At last she broke the silence she could no longer keep.

" I met Mr. Pensax this evening as I was coming home from the club. Has he been here to call ? "

" Not that I know of. I have seen nothing of him," replied Nonia indifferently, punching the pillow under her head to rest with even greater comfort.

" Were you at home all the afternoon ? "

" No ; I went for a long walk up the hill. Abdul and Houssain came with me. We took Tiglath Pileser, Teddy, and Pishasha. It was such a lovely afternoon. I never saw the mountains looking more beautiful."

Miss Madersfield cared nothing about the mountains, and showed no interest in the constitutionals of Nonia's pets.

"Mr. Pensax was riding down the road. His horse was in a lather, as if he had been some distance."

"Did he know you?"

"I think so; but I am not sure. He must be aware that you and I are living here."

"I dare say," replied Nonia indifferently, as she raised herself to drink her coffee. She had a keen appreciation of the material pleasures of life. Her enjoyment of the good things that came within her reach was infectious, and her gratitude to those who conjured up pleasure was unstinted in its expression. Even the stolid old sepoy and his nephew, Abdul, both fatalist by inheritance and creed, were moved to little acts that would bring a sparkle of joy into her eyes and words of gracious thanks to her lips, only for the sake of her gratitude.

"You don't mind meeting Mr. Pensax? You won't refuse to see him if he calls?" said Miss Madersfield.

"Why should I?" asked Nonia, settling herself back with luxurious comfort in the large armchair. She raised her eyebrows and looked at her companion, who was regarding her with a troubled expression. "He is nothing to me, and I am nothing to him—now," she added as an afterthought.

"I have had a letter from Colonel Tredmere by to-day's mail. He says very decidedly that it would be better not to renew our acquaintance with him."

Nonia remained silent for a few seconds as she focussed her wandering attention upon the subject. Then she gave a little laugh.

"So he has written to you about Dick, has he? Which means that he doesn't altogether trust me. He is an old dear and means well, but—he doesn't understand that the present generation refuses to make tragedies of its little mistakes. Tragedy, like drunkenness, is going out of

fashion. We bury our mistakes decently without any fuss, and write epitaphs over their graves! 'Here lies my first mistake: rest in peace, for experience bought is experience taught.'"

"Mistakes can't be forgotten like that. Their consequences remain."

"They can be ignored until one forgets that they have been made," replied Nonia carelessly. "By-the-bye, I have a suspicion that I have just made yet another."

"Oh, Nonia! what do you mean?" exclaimed Miss Madersfield, sitting bolt upright, and looking at the lithe young figure extended in the chair, feet upon the fender and arms thrown up above her head.

"A very serious mistake, auntie! Tiglath Pileser rounded on me this afternoon in the jungle and tried to bite me! He's getting on; growing up much too fast. I'm afraid I did wrong to adopt him; but he is such a darling when he is good that I can't find it in my heart to turn him adrift."

"Or order him to be killed; that would be the best course," pronounced Miss Madersfield, taking up her knitting. "Then you might bury him and label him your last mistake—until you made another."

"Oh no, auntie! I couldn't do that! I couldn't be so unkind! Houssain says I mustn't take him into the jungle. The trees and rocks talk to him, he declares, and make him want to run wild. The jungle calls. I can understand what Houssain means, because I can feel the call myself. It makes me want to run deeper and deeper into the forest and get away from mankind altogether—Europeans, I mean. I don't mind Houssain and Abdul. They are jungle folk themselves."

Nonia was silent, lost again in thought. She had gone back in fancy to the jungle, her spirit responding to its

summons. Like Tiglath Pileser, she tried to bite the hand that held her in leash and be free. The mysterious inner recess of the forest—that will-o'-the-wisp which the wanderer is ever seeking but never attains—had been reached in fancy. She was no more a trespasser there than the leopard and the sambur. The palaces of the primeval forest were her own, hers and her companion's; for she was not alone in her dream. A figure was by her side, and together they moved under leafy arches set with petals of rare colour that were the playground of glinting flies. Together they two listened to the sigh of the wind, the call of the hill-cuckoo, the whistling of the thrush and the cadences of the barbet.

"Nonia, have you seen the English mail?" asked Miss Madersfield, breaking the gossamer threads of fancy. "There's a letter for you. The writing is Colonel Tredmere's."

With a faint sigh the girl rose and went to her writing-table. She brought her letter to the lamp and read it through twice as she stood in the circle of light. Then she folded the sheet and replaced it in its envelope.

"Well?" Miss Madersfield glanced up from her knitting and let the pins drop on her lap. "Well?" she repeated, as her companion did not reply immediately.

"Colonel Tredmere seems more disturbed than ever. I don't understand it. Last week he hinted at difficulties. This week he speaks more plainly. He wants me to come home at once; asks me to leave Coonoor on receipt of his letter and go to Colombo—why Colombo, I wonder?—why not Bombay?"

"Because there are so many more steamers calling at Colombo than there are at Bombay," replied Miss Madersfield, with something like impatience in her usually placid voice.

"And take the first steamer home."

"Ah!" The ejaculation inferred that Miss Madersfield knew all about it, and had nothing to urge against Colonel Tredmere's proposal.

Nonia made a little movement, a habit she had, as though to shake herself free from a difficulty.

"I shall not go," she said at last. Then, as there was no response of approval she repeated the sentence. "I shall not go; I don't want to go home to England."

"It would be wise to take the colonel's advice. The reason he gives is excellent," said Miss Madersfield, looking at her with some anxiety.

"Excellent—if true. But, auntie," she lowered her voice although there was no one to hear, the servants being engaged in the consumption of the one important meal of the day, "I don't believe it is true. Colonel Tredmere allows himself to be blown this way and that by all sorts of fears. He has been deceived more than once, been miserably imposed on and taken in——"

"So have you, quite as much as he has," replied Miss Madersfield, a little sharply.

"Yes," admitted Nonia, a note of sadness in her voice; "but it need not occur again. I learned a lesson—the lesson of distrust that no dog can learn—not to trust in man every time he calls 'Rats!'" She drew herself up. "I won't go home; I won't be driven away from all that makes me happy at last, all that I love so much—the mountains and the sholas, the grassy downs; my garden, my pets; Houssain and Abdul. Why—why should I leave them? They want me; no one else wants me! I am happy with them, and I'll stay! Yes; I'll stand fast on my own ground and face the music."

"It will mean—no peace for you as long as Dick remains here."

"Let it mean what it likes; I don't care!" said Nonia, with a sudden laugh that came like the sun out of the cloud on the hills. The tragedy of the moment was cast behind her, and she refused to be disturbed by the fears and forebodings of the older generation. Her associations with the jungle should not be broken; nor would she allow herself to be driven from her happy playing-fields and sent back to the grey colourless life of the past.

"You are without a friend," said Miss Madersfield, trying in vain to steady the fingers that gripped the knitting-needles.

"If I want the help of a friend, I think I know where to find one," replied Nonia.

"Not Dick Pensax!" exclaimed Miss Madersfield incredulously.

"No! not Dick Pensax," she said softly, as she dropped back into the easy-chair and let fancy spread its wings once more.

CHAPTER VI

The Glenview Hotel was a rambling overgrown bungalow, an irregular building to which rooms had been added at various times. A raised verandah ran along the front, and from it there was a fine view of the plains and the Hoolicul Droog. The large centre rooms leading to the verandah were used as dining and drawing-room. A smaller room at the further end of the building, where the carriage sweep ended, was labelled smoking-room; but it was rarely occupied, the visitors preferring the broad, partially-screened verandah or the reading-room. The dining-room was set out with small tables, and dinner was served between the hours of half-past seven and half-past eight.

Warborough usually dined at eight. During the few weeks he had been at Coonoor the hotel had not been full, and there was no necessity for any crowding. He had therefore been assigned a place at a small table which he had had to himself.

On the other side of the dining-room sat Pensax, also with a table to himself. He dined at half-past eight, and rarely entered the room till Warborough was almost ready to leave. When Pensax first arrived he occupied a small sitting-room, where he took his meals. As the season approached for visitors to come up to the hills, the proprietor of the hotel, an old mess-sergeant and an Englishman,

raised his terms. The bedroom was large and opened into the smoking-room; and Pensax decided to give up the sitting-room and dine with the guests. Being of a sociable disposition, the change involved no hardship. On the contrary, he benefited by it, as it threw him more with the rest of the visitors and gave him a little companionship. He had a writing-table in his bedroom and a comfortable lounge. As no lady ever entered the smoking-room, he could leave his door open if he wanted more air, or bring his newspaper or writing materials to the smoking-room table and work at his reports undisturbed. It was the quietest portion of the bungalow. A shrubbery of flowering bushes extended from just below his windows down to a shaded road some sixty feet below, a road that was seldom used, leading into the old disused ghat road.

After Warborough left Mrs. Cotheridge he walked slowly on to the hotel. The way was deserted except for a pony-carriage with lamps lighted, hurrying home to one of the houses in the Wellington direction.

The silence of the hills brooded over the little station. He could just distinguish against the star-lit sky a gathering cloud-cap on Teneriffe. Twists of responsive mist curled up like ghosts from the lower valleys beyond Tiger Hill. Behind him on the outskirts of Sim's Park the jackals called to each other, and raised their chorus of yelps as they followed an alluring scent towards the racecourse. He lost the sound as he turned and passed under the thick hedge of wattle that overhung the way.

In his room he found the English mail, which for some unaccountable reason, known only to his dressing-boy, had been delayed in its delivery. There was a long letter from his mother full of family news. After he had dressed for dinner he opened it, and was soon absorbed in its contents; so deeply interested was he that he failed to notice

the dinner-gong when it sounded a second time to summon those who dined at eight.

The chief topic of the letter was the marriage of a girl to whom Warborough had once been engaged. He had fancied himself in love then. Now he knew very certainly that the feeling he had had was not love. It was chiefly flattered vanity. She had seemed to be so devotedly attached, so very much in love with him, and her devotion roused in him a responsive sentiment that he believed must be love.

The story was simple. An engagement; an inquiry into means; the discovery that although he had prospects of something more than his pay—those prospects brought him in nothing for immediate needs. Following on this discovery came another inevitable realization—the fact that marriage for the present would be sheer folly; and so the wedding had to be deferred indefinitely.

Warborough, with his profession to occupy his thoughts, would have been quite content to wait. The girl was not at all pleased with the arrangement. She had no profession to divert her mind from marriage; and when another man crossed her path whose prospects were better, and who could afford to marry at once, she gave up Warborough without further compunction.

He was surprised to find how little he was affected by her breach of faith, and to what a small degree the surface of his life was ruffled. It was difficult with all his work to find a moment for introspection; but when it came he began to realize that, though he had had time to play at making love on a holiday, he had always been too busy, too full of occupation to allow marriage to become an absorbing idea. He tried to feel hurt and disappointed when he first heard of her engagement; but he made a poor hand at nursing a broken heart. In a couple of weeks

he decided that his heart was not broken ; it was as sound as a bell, to quote the doctors' language. A little later he recognized that fate had interfered for his good. Convinced that he had never been in love, he congratulated himself on the happy ending to the affair, and sent the bride a handsome wedding present, with his best wishes, wishes that were more genuine than she could believe. As for his mother, she made no attempt to hide her satisfaction over his escape, as she persisted in calling it. To show that she bore no malice she also despatched a present to the bride, and expressed a hope that she might be able to come to the wedding.

The letter was full of details that could not be called news, yet they interested him more than a little. There were allusions to old friends and scraps of information about them and their belongings. Many had been the inquiries after her son, and every message kindly given was scrupulously passed on.

Beguiled by the intimate chat from beyond the seas and the thoughts it conjured up, the time slipped by unnoticed. It was half-past eight before he remembered that dinner was waiting.

At the entrance to the dining-room he was met by the proprietor, who was full of regrets and apologies. A sudden influx of visitors had necessitated a rearrangement of the room. He had been obliged to put another gentleman at Captain Warborough's table. It was unavoidable ; but he had done his best. He had chosen a gentleman who had been here some time instead of a stranger lately arrived.

As the old mess-sergeant poured out his apologies, Warborough glanced in the direction of the table at which he usually sat ; he recognized in the guest chosen to be his companion Dick Pensax, who was already seated there ; he knew him by sight only.

"That's all right, Bond," said Warborough, after an almost imperceptible pause. "You don't want to change my room, I hope; I shan't like that."

Bond reassured him, saying that this was the only change that was necessary, and he would not have made it unless he had been absolutely compelled.

"You see, sir, we're filling up fast, and shall be fuller still in the Wellington race week."

"Oh, is that so? That's all right," replied Warborough, using an expression that was often on his lips.

He moved across the room and took his seat, the eyes of the new arrivals following the well-set-up figure in evening dress with some curiosity.

"Sorry to disturb you," said Pensax as Warborough seated himself. "The only alternative was to starve. Bond insisted on taking my table for a colonel and his wife and daughter, and gave me no choice."

"Oh don't trouble about it; it's all right; very glad, I'm sure," replied Warborough, with the unobtrusive courtesy of the well-bred man. His face wore its usual restful look that inclined towards blankness rather than expression, and no shadow of annoyance was visible. It was the look that had prompted Mrs. Cotheridge to call him "wooden-headed."

The two men had never exchanged a word until now. Pensax was a smoker, and the little time he had to spare was spent in the smoking-room. Warborough did not smoke, hence the smoking-room had no attraction. He had the Englishman's love of fresh air. On fine evenings he slipped on a light overcoat, changed his shoes, and strolled out into the garden, pacing up and down by the edge of the shrubbery, where grew the white rhododendron, gnarled and crooked with age, bushes of purple heliotrope, lemon-scented verbena, pink bottle-brush, and the orange

trees that were never out of blossom or without fruit. Sometimes, if he had been in the saddle all day, he got into his tweeds again and took a good walk by moonlight.

Pensax, on the contrary, preferred the house. At no time was he fond of walking. It was not the result of laziness. On occasions when he had a reason for it he was capable of a good deal of energy, but it did not take the form of aimless physical exercise. If it was necessary to go out any distance after dinner, he rode or hired one of the hotel carriages.

"A lot of new arrivals to-day," remarked Pensax, who was sociably inclined and found it impossible to be in any one's company long without speaking.

"And more coming, so Bond says," replied Warborough.

"I don't wonder! When you think of the grilling plains—the dust, the mosquitoes, that awful heat!—the marvel is that the whole of the European population don't swarm up here."

"Can't unless they get leave."

"I don't see why their work shouldn't be done up here for part of the year. Headquarters sets them an example by going to Ooty." Then, construing the silence into a want of agreement on the part of his listener, he added, "But I am not in the service. I'm an outsider; and of course I don't understand the inner workings of the machinery. You're within the ropes, and I dare say know a good deal more about it than I do."

He made the statement in such a way that no question was implied and no reply was needed; Warborough maintained silence, not from any absence of sympathy, but because he was naturally slow of speech with a stranger.

"These hills have a wonderful climate," continued Pensax, well content to have the conversation on his side. "When I first saw them from Mettapollium—just a rugged

line of blue against the sky—I couldn't believe in them. I couldn't believe that they were eight thousand feet high, seven thousand feet higher than the point where I was. I felt certain they were over-rated, and couldn't have such a climate as I had heard described more than once by enthusiastic visitors. I came up by train and watched my aneroid as we mounted the ghat. It was astonishing to see the way the thing marked up the height. Thought it must be out of order; but it wasn't. And when I did get up here I found every word true. You know Ooty, of course?"

"Yes, a little. I may go on there if I get tired of this."

"I've stayed at the place. I came up to these hills eight months ago, and six of them I spent at Ooty. It's wonderfully bracing; but it is too cold for me. I like Coonoor better."

Pensax talked on without any embarrassment, keeping to general subjects and avoiding anything that might appear personal. His genial open manner had a charm of its own; it was not lost on Warborough, who was naturally inclined to be reserved to a fault. He responded politely and with increasing interest as the other spoke of himself.

"I'm not up here for pleasure, though," remarked Pensax presently, unable to keep away from the absorbing topic of his own doings. "I'm here on business, prospecting for a syndicate, and I can tell you it keeps me pretty busy."

"I suppose you haven't confined yourself to this district?" asked Warborough.

"No; I've been all over India. I was born in the country, and feel as if it were my home. A year and a half ago I was working in Bangalore for a company that had a concession not far from the goldfields. I was looking

for gold, of course. Last year I was in the neighbourhood of Poona. Now I've been sent up here."

"I was thinking of these hills when I spoke and wondering whether you had been beyond Ooty or in the Kotagiri direction?"

"I've ridden or walked over most of the country round here, but I found nothing to warrant any outlay on blasting rock or sinking shafts. Practically I've drawn a blank except in the Mysore direction. Of course I've by no means finished. I must have a gang of men out on the other side of the cordite factory. I dare say I shall be a couple of months messing about up here; but I never know what orders I may receive from the syndicate that employs me."

"You must come across game now and then."

"I do; but I let it alone and it lets me alone, I'm glad to say," replied Pensax, with a boyish laugh. "If you want to know of places where you are sure to find game, big game, I mean, I shall be glad to let you have the benefit of my experience. I've seen you more than once going out with your rifle—and camera too, if I am not mistaken."

He glanced at Warborough with a twinkle in his eye, as much as to say, I know all about you and your occupations.

"Yes; I do more photographing than shooting, to tell you the truth."

"What camera do you use?"

Warborough mentioned the name of the maker, and they discussed the various merits of the different manufacturers.

"I suppose you are after films for moving pictures?" said Pensax, looking rather pleased with himself over his shrewdness.

The other admitted that he had the means of taking cinema photographs.

"But I haven't had much chance of using the camera. Fact is, there is no game between here and Ooty. The soldiers have scared it all away."

"With their butterfly nets and bug-hunting, as they call it! I often meet parties of men just loafing on the hills. Some of them walk for the amusement of it. Others sit about in the shade reading and talking or sleeping, just as the fancy takes them. Wellington is a very dull place for a regiment."

"Have you actually seen any big game about here?"

"Not nearer than the Koondahs. If you want ibex or a possible tiger you must go to Bandipore or Kolakumby. It's lovely country in that direction, rolling downs near Ooty and then undulating ground mostly covered with thick jungle; but it's no good to me. I've no use for grass land or jungle. My business is with the rocks."

"And mine," rejoined Warborough, "on the contrary, is with the grass and jungle. Only I ought not to call my occupation business, as it is of my own choosing."

"Well, if you really want to know how the land lies in the direction of the Koondahs, you come to me, and I'll show you my maps. They're filled up, of course, with geological notes; but they will give you a very good idea of the mountains, the forest, and the paths and all that."

Pensax rose as his servant brought him a box of cigars. "Have one?" he asked.

"No thanks," replied Warborough, rising too. He was about to move away in the direction of his own room, when Pensax said, as though inspired by a sudden thought—

"Got any engagement this evening? No? Then come into the smoking-room. Why shouldn't you look at the maps at once?"

"Your own drawing?"

"Yes—and no; I tell you what I do," he continued

confidentially. "I get the Government survey maps and enlarge them and make my own notes."

"That's not a bad plan if you want to do the thing systematically," remarked Warborough.

"Of course, I have to do the work systematically and send in a report practically of every inch of the ground they want me to report on. It saves no end of trouble if I write explanatory notes on the map itself. You would scarcely credit the time it takes to hunt up specimens and examine the formation of the cliffs. The cuttings for the railway to Ooty have been a great help, but the jungle is an awful nuisance to a geologist like myself, who isn't playing with the subject."

The two men moved towards the smoking-room, which, as usual, was unoccupied. It was lighted at the end nearest the door of Pensax's bedroom.

"Wait here a moment, and I'll bring my sheets," he said, disappearing through the half-doors.

He returned almost immediately with half a dozen rolls, which he laid on the table. Again his manner put Warborough in mind of a schoolboy exhibiting his latest treasure. There was something attractive about him with his open, easy talk, his ready smile and honest enthusiasm. The brown eyes lighted up, and the well-formed mouth with its full lips varied in its expression under the influence of every passing emotion as he spoke, even though the subject was nothing but geology.

"There's work for you! Look at those!" said Pensax, as he laid the rolls on the table and opened one of the sheets, spreading it where the light fell, an expression of simple pride upon his handsome features.

The map represented that part of the Nilgiris known as the Koondahs. It was covered with notes in his neat handwriting, and Warborough examined it with keen attention.

His eye swept over the surface rapidly. Pensax followed his glance.

"Ah! you're interested in the roads and paths. All you sportsmen make for them; and then you go for the high open land where you can use your field-glasses. You see this little black cross? From that point, with an ordinary telescope, I made out four beautiful saddlebacks. Doesn't that make your mouth water? As I said, I'm not a sportsman. As far as the ibex are concerned, they may be there still. I wasn't responsible for the death of any."

Warborough laughed a low, almost noiseless, laugh. "You appear to have taken our measure pretty accurately. Yes; I should have been uncommonly glad to have had a sight of them, not to say a shot at them—with the camera, I mean."

"They were too far off for photographing; but you might perhaps have stalked them and got nearer."

Warborough, never communicative, did not say that he had a telephoto lens, and that he could have taken an excellent picture if only he, instead of Pensax, had been there. He looked at a small red cross on another spot.

"What's that for?" he asked.

"Bison. I saw their tracks, but I didn't catch a glimpse of the bison themselves. Didn't want to, to tell you the truth. Not being a good shot, I've no use for bison at close quarters, nor for tigers and leopards."

"These are your geological notes, I suppose," said Warborough, looking at neat little paragraphs dotted all over the map. You seem to have done all that country very thoroughly. Were you repaid by any good find?"

"I didn't come across a single specimen that would justify my syndicate even of talking of a company unless they want to quarry for stone. These hills are mostly gneiss

and granite—excellent stuff for building and road-making, but no good for anything else."

"Are there no old workings?"

"Very few, and those are for building material and curry stones."

"No silver or copper—or gold?"

"None whatever, and never likely to be. Now let me show you the best way to get to the Koondahs. You go by rail to Ooty, to begin with."

Warborough was examining the map closely. "What about this path? It seems to lead in the direction of Wellington. Can't I strike it by turning off the road between Wellington and Ooty?"

"Not unless you're prepared to cross two or three swamps and wade through a couple of cold streams of doubtful depth. No; you must make up your mind to go to Ooty and use that place as your starting-point for all the country north-west and west of us. If there had been any way of reaching it by a short cut from Wellington, there wouldn't be much chance of finding game over in that direction."

He went into further detail of how the expedition was to be done, and where the Kurumba trackers were to be found who would lead the sportsman to the haunts of the game. Warborough saw that Pensax had a personal knowledge of the locality, and must have explored it thoroughly in the interests of his employers. When he had finished he commented on the fact.

"I thought I knew more about these hills than any other visitor, but you beat me by a long way."

"You're doing it for pleasure with that gun and camera of yours. I'm doing it because I'm paid—and well paid, too—although, mind you, I earn every penny of my money. I'm out at all hours and always on the watch—on the watch

for specimens, for some sign of what I want," he explained, as Warborough's eyes were bent upon his with a sudden flicker of inquiry that passed as quickly as it appeared.

"May I have a look at those other sheets?" he asked.

Pensax unrolled them and held each to the light with the satisfaction of a successful artist in his creations.

"Here's one that will interest you. It represents the country all round Coonoor, and you probably know it better than I do."

"I don't think I do. I certainly don't know it geologically. What are the boundary-lines between Coonoor and Wellington?"

"Here they are," he replied, readily running his finger along an imaginary line. "And here you have the boundary dividing Coonoor from Kotagiri."

"I see that Chamra House is on the boundary and all that shola and hill behind is mostly Government land. The Kotagiri boundary line is separated by a broad belt of uncultivated country."

"Coarse grass waist-deep, boulders and slab-rock, precipice and tangled ravines, jungle and scrub; not very profitable to the revenue department, I imagine."

Again his boyish laugh awoke echoes in the quiet smoking-room, and Warborough gave him another of those swift glances that showed he was puzzled by the man, for he saw no cause for amusement in the remark.

"Have you done any prospecting over that bit?" he asked.

"Indeed, I have! I'm on the job now; and my men—a gang of them—are at work here."

He laid his finger on a part of the map between Chamra House and Kotagiri.

"You've got some old workings there, haven't you?"

"Not a sign of any such thing."

"I mean workings for gold made about forty or fifty years ago?"

There was a slight pause, during which Pensax seemed to be casting the matter over in his mind.

"I don't think there's anything of the kind. If there were I should have seen them. Who mentioned old workings?"

"I'm sure I don't know; I think I heard it from one of the people I've met up here; probably at the club."

"And he, whoever he was, got it from his gardener! If you listen to the natives up here they'll tell you of treasure hidden in caves in Dodabetta; gold and gems brought up from Mysore in the old days of Haider Ali, and that precious son of his, Tippoo Sultan. The Budagas say that the treasure is guarded by white giant ghosts. Funny chaps, these natives! They think I'm looking for treasure. Some of them believe that I've found a receipt for turning the yellow pyrites into gold by soaking them in one of these mineral oils that I use for the little engine that drives the drill. Dreamers, all of them!"

"The drugs they take help them to dream."

Pensax glanced at Warborough; then looked at the end of his cigar, and knocked the ash off gently into the ash-tray.

"You may well say that! I can't tell you the bother I have over that very thing. Every native who comes to these hills uses opium and smokes a decoction of tobacco and hemp. They say that it keeps fever away. It makes them stupid and unfit for the work I want them to do. Sometimes I've had to stop working to give them time to recover. All these hillmen, Budagas and Todas, take opium in more or less quantity, I'm told. Have you ever smoked it yourself?"

"Never; I don't know that I should like to try it."

"I've tried it out of curiosity. Don't mean to do it again, for it leaves you feeling perfectly beastly in body and spirit; but before the depression comes it's all right. Did you ever hear the English sailor's description of how he felt when he visited one of the China dens at Hongkong? He said he began by feeling as if he were a cross between an archangel and an emperor, and he ended by feeling like a sick devil."

Warborough laughed. "How do your men get their supplies?" he asked.

"From the Budagas. They bring the stuff up and sell it at their toddy shops. They have to get a licence, of course; but that's easy enough for the regular men who run the shops. The soldiers, I hear, have found out how to get it. Quite easy if they can walk as far as the hill villages and back," added Pensax, with a laugh.

"I don't know about that," said Warborough.

"Of course they must do it on the quiet. The soldier is such an ass; he's so noisy as soon as he gets a little liquor inside him; and he lets everybody know what he's been about. You should see my men. They never make a row, though some of them may be a little quarrelsome if interfered with. If only their legs didn't give way I should never know that they had been drinking."

Warborough rose to go, as if he was just a little tired of the subject.

"You know, perhaps, that the police are trying to find out how the men at Wellington are getting arrack?" said Pensax, throwing away the end of his cigar.

"I heard that they were going to have an inquiry into the matter," Warborough replied politely, but with no interest.

The other was quick to observe it, and changed the conversation.

"I suppose you, being an idle man, have had time to call round on the residents and you know every one here?" he remarked, with a suspicion that his companion was possibly being bored.

"I think I've made everybody's acquaintance except the latest arrivals."

"I should like to have followed your example, but I haven't had time. I know nobody—oh yes! by the way! what am I saying? I've met Mrs. and Miss Honington, and Miss Armscote."

"Miss Armscote!" repeated Warborough, with the faintest echo of surprise in his voice.

"Knew her years ago in England. I must make time somehow to look her up. Can't think what she will say to me when she hears that I've been two months in the place without going near her!"

Pensax picked up his maps. "Good night; I'm turning in at once, as I have to be up early."

He entered his bedroom and threw the maps down on a writing-table littered with papers.

"Funny chap, that!" was his comment as he yawned sleepily. "He's combining business with pleasure unless I'm very much mistaken, though he doesn't want people to know it. He's supplying one of these cinema fellows with films; that's what he's after. Paying business as long as there aren't too many in the field. Perhaps I'll take it up myself one day if I find prospecting doesn't pay. At present I've no reason to grumble. Prospecting does pay."

He had thrown aside his coat and taken off his collar. At this point in his toilet he stopped and turned with a sudden impulse to a piano that stood near his dressing-table. His sleepiness had disappeared for the time. He opened the instrument, and without music or lights began

to play and sing. Two or three visitors still lingering in the drawing-room stepped out on to the verandah and looked towards the smoking-room, from which direction the sound of singing came.

"I wish he would come and sing here; he has a divine voice, whoever he may be," said a lady.

Presently Pensax stopped as abruptly as he had begun, and in another fifteen minutes he was fast asleep.

CHAPTER VII

Early on the day following his walk with Mrs. Cotheridge, Warborough rode up to Chamra House and asked for Miss Madersfield and Miss Armscote. In his pocket were the photographs and sketch-maps of which he had spoken. He was aware that the elder lady was not an early riser, and he had no expectation of seeing her. Nonia, on the contrary, liked to be up with the sun; and he made sure that he would find her among her flowers directing the gardener and his two assistants in their labours.

The man who answered the door informed him that Miss Armscote had gone out. She had left the bungalow half an hour ago. Was she walking in the shola behind the house? he asked. No; an officer gentleman from Wellington had brought a carriage that ran without horses and had taken her for a drive. Warborough remembered that it was the military weekly holiday, and concluded that they were making an expedition into the hills in Berringham's car.

He was slightly disappointed, although he would not have admitted it. The garden was deserted, the gardener and coolies having seized the opportunity of the mistress's absence to devote their attention to the vegetables that flourished in an untidy enclosure lying on a sunny terrace below the lawn. Nonia was lavish with her English seeds, which, the gardener assured her, were more than half eaten by jungle rats. As long as there was a sufficient supply

of vegetables for the house she did not trouble herself to make any inquiries, and was therefore ignorant of the fact that she grew about three times the amount of stuff that was used in her kitchen. The gardener reaped a harvest in the surplus which duly found its way to the market in Coonoor. It was only by stealing every available minute from the flowers that he managed to put in enough labour to keep the vegetable garden going.

Warborough turned away from the door. Instead of mounting his horse at once, he strolled on to the lawn, knowing that the liberty would not be resented when he should confess to his trespass.

The morning air was scented with growing vegetation and buds that were bursting into bloom. The flower-beds, wet with the shower-bath of the previous night, were drying in the sun. Standing with his back to the house, he looked across the wide valley towards the distant hills.

It was only just seven o'clock, and the shadows were still broad and deep, and marked in the rich transparent blue that has given this part of the Western Ghats their name, a blue that overlays everything without obliterating a single detail. Trees and rocks were visible just as pebbles and seaweed shine through the clear green waters of the sea. The sholas in the clefts and valleys were still asleep; but as the golden light crept down the hillsides and laid a magic finger on forest and precipice, the blue vanished, and vivid tints of green and crimson and gray were revealed.

The great mountain mass overlooking Coonoor, called Teneriffe—from its fancied likeness to the original of that name—stood half in shade and half in sunlight, a very queen of hills with its graceful head and flowing slopes falling away like green drapery. A few filmy shreds of cloud still hung about its summit, the remnant of its nightcap, soon to be chased away by the midday heat.

From the hills his eyes came back to rest upon the wealth of blossom by which he was surrounded. He watched a pair of little honeysuckers—the nearest approach to humming-birds on the Nilgiri Hills—as they pierced the fuchsia bells and sucked the honey. The green and black butterflies with sharp wings and strong zig-zag flight, pursued each other over the long scarlet bracts of the poinsettia, leaving the bees in undisputed possession of the sweeter flowers. They were lotus-eating bees, Bohemian to the core, gathering honey only for present needs. No need for haste or anxiety where summer lasts all the year round; and the roses and heliotropes, like the gorse in England, are never out of bloom.

The spirit of perpetual summer brooded over Nonia's garden as it might have brooded over that first visionary garden of Adam and Eve. Active, energetic, made of hard stuff capable of enduring, Warborough had his rare moments or relaxation when a small unrecognised voice spoke from his innermost being, and bade him stop to grasp something sweeter than the nettles of his busy life. It was his habit to turn a deaf ear to such calls.

This morning, however, the summer of those southern Indian hills entered his veins and awoke an involuntary response. Had he been higher up on the bare hill-top, facing a keener breeze, rugged ground under his feet, and a rough tangle of uncultivated grass and scrub round him, he would have been conscious only of exhilaration and the *joie-de-vivre* that spurred him on to accomplish all that he had set himself to do.

But here in Nonia's garden, a garden that owed something of its perfection to her thought and design, the spell crept over him, and he yielded to its allurements. To chase the phantasy away, turn a deaf ear and crush it seemed like crushing Nonia, for she was part of the garden

and the garden was part of herself. The roses and fuchsias the honey-suckers, the pied robins and green barbets, the silvery grevillia and blue-green eucalyptus, the gay butterflies and lazy humming bees were all gossamer threads that bound the garden to its owner.

He yielded to the seductive influence and allowed himself to sink immersed in the sensuousness of that perfect summer morning. Unconsciously he envied the birds and flowers and insects, the bounties provided for them by Nature. He felt that, like them, he could have eaten the lotus and forgotten all else. In the sunshine of Nonia's presence he could forget the harrying world, the plains, the heat and dust, and the strain of the responsibility of work.

The rosy dream of love in the hills melted away like the shreds of cloud on Teneriffe at the bidding of his vigorous temperament. It did not die a natural death, but was banished; he would have declared it destroyed, annihilated, though why he should not entertain those softer moods he could not have said. Emotions that are banished to the lumber-room of our inner being to perish of inanition have a way of merely remaining dormant, of storing up strength rather than dissipating it, and of lying in wait for an opportunity to return.

Warborough turned away from the flowers and followed the path that led towards the spot where the animals were housed.

Tiglath Pileser was asleep in the sun, a dog-chain confining him to a staple in the wall. Teddy, also chained with length enough of tether to allow of a short perambulation, sat up on his haunches awake and observant outside his kennel, waiting for some one to take him for a stroll. The kite, fed to repletion, appeared somnolent in spite of the early hour. Perhaps the consciousness of a broken wing

extinguished all hope of flight for the present; and resignation to fate followed, as it often does after a good meal.

At the approach of Warborough, Teddy's little black eyes seemed to twinkle slyly with the memory of his feat in cornering the visitor. He opened his mouth and wagged his head solemnly as if to greet him. "Sorry I can't give you such a warm welcome to-day. Circumstances over which I have no control prevent me from showing the friendliness that I feel."

Warborough stopped in front of him. Teddy might easily have risen on his hind legs and embraced him, but he made no attempt to do so.

"Well, Teddy, old man, how goes the world with you? Have you been holding up any more of your mistress's friends? Or are you mending your manners and minding your ways? as they used to say to me at my dame's school."

"That Teddee a good boy now," said Abdul's voice at his elbow.

"How did Houssain make him good?" asked Warborough.

"By talking only."

"I talked to Teddy a good deal, but it had no effect on him."

"He can't understand English. Very hard language to learn. Understanding country talk only."

"Miss Armscote is very good to these beasts," remarked Warborough, more to himself than to his companion.

"Our missie is plenty too good sometimes. Anything sick or broken in leg or arm, missie says to Houssain, 'Bring and make well. I very sorry to see paining.' One day our missie find big Toda dog with front leg broken. She bring him home, treating very kind. Afterwards, when dog got well, he growled and tried to bite missie. Then

Houssain led him into the jungle alone by himself and talked to dog. Dog came home plenty good and never tried to bite again."

"Where is the dog—here?"

"No, sir; a hillman came to sell honey one day. When he saw dog he dropped all his bottles and cried out in jungle talk, 'Sonnie, sonnie!' Dog heard and gave big bark and big jump with all four legs at once. Hillman caught him in his arms and cried, plenty water in eyes; and dog licked face all over. Then both ran away, and missie got honey instead of dog. Very good honey with no jaggery in it."

Abdul grinned at the memory of the luscious luxury which he had evidently shared with his mistress.

"His old master, of course," commented Warborough. "I wonder how the dog's leg got broken?"

"Houssain met the man one day afterwards in the shola. Dog fell over the rock and hillman never knew. Looking everywhere and couldn't find. Plenty crying that man, and thinking leopard will eat. Afterwards nicely pleased to find dog again with leg mended."

"How is the baby leopard, Abdul?"

"Properly full of milk, sar. By-and-by he grow a big boy, very naughty with claws. Houssain will have to talk to him and make good."

"So he has begun to scratch and bite already, has he?"

"Yes, sar. Yesterday we take him into the shola. Wind blowing among trees; snake eagles calling in sky; nice smell of jungle sheep and wild pig on ground. P'leeser make sniff-noise with nose same like dog, and try to sharpen claws on tree. Missie say, 'Don't do that, P'leeser.' Then he growl and make more sniff-noise and pull at chain. 'Naughty P'leeser, mustn't pull,' missie say, holding chain tight. Then P'leeser, turning on missie, scratch her

dress down, tearing big hole. Missie cry out to Houssain, walking in front with Teddy bear on one side and Pishasha loose on the other. Quick like thunder light in the sky Pishasha jump on to P'leeser and they fight, Pishasha pulling and biting P'leeser's ears and P'leeser scratching with claws."

Warborough could not help smiling as he pictured the dissensions of Nonia's happy family.

"I suppose they didn't hurt each other?"

"Hair too thick like blanket for teeth to hurt. Houssain soon pulling Pishasha away and scolding. That monkey plenty talking and calling P'leeser very bad names for trying to bite our missie."

Abdul looked up into Warborough's face as though he had arrived at a knotty point that required an explanation.

"I thinking Pishasha very fond of our missie. All monkeys like our missie. The last one plenty too fond. Houssain had to send away."

"What did the other monkey do?" asked Warborough, amused with the chatter of the boy and ready to hear all he had to say on the subject of "our missie."

Abdul glanced to right and left to see if any one were within hearing. Satisfied that they were alone, he told a strange story.

It had happened more than eighteen months previously. Colonel Tredmere had gone home, leaving Houssain as a kind of bodyguard to Miss Armscote. He laid an injunction on the old sepoy that he was never to allow her to walk alone in the jungle; and Houssain promised to be faithful to his trust.

Then, as now, the pensioner had his pet monkey. He did not seem particularly attached to the animal except in one respect. It accompanied him everywhere, and he was seldom seen without it. It slept with him and shared

his food; it went with him in all his walks, running free in the jungle, sometimes disappearing for half an hour in the undergrowth or climbing a tree for berries. Houssain showed no anxiety on its behalf. He was satisfied that it would reach home safely, and turn up in the course of ten minutes or so after his master had arrived.

One day Nonia wandered off into the shola in search of terrestrial orchids. Houssain was having his midday meal. Not wishing to disturb him, she started by herself, without leaving word where she was to be found.

"That other Pishasha, he see missie going and he follow. Missie walk and walk in the thick shola, getting big bunch of flowers; and Pishasha walk by her side, same like Houssain, often looking back and talking monkey talk. All at once monkey cry out, 'Arrrah!' and show teeth."

Abdul's perfect imitation of the monkey's face and voice made his listener smile.

"Missie listen, thinking leopard coming. Then monkey run back and missie hear big cry. She, too, run back and find Periyar, the house watchman, lying same like dead on the ground behind big rock with big stone and plenty blood on yed [head]. Houssain come running up too. He put water on yed and Periyar open eye. He hear Pishasha scolding and he say, 'Bad, wicked monkey! He throw stone over rock and beat me on yed. Must kill that wicked beast!' Houssain keep very quiet, and say to missie, 'Stone fall of itself, I think.' Periyar cry out very angry, 'Lie word! that one big lie word, missie! Monkey done throw stone himself. I know, because I see his arm, his long arm covered with hair!' Then Houssain, still keeping quiet, look at monkey, plenty sorry he is such a naughty boy. He very fond of that Pishasha."

"What was Periyar doing there?" asked Warborough.

"He say he following instead of Houssain to take care

of missie. Houssain say, 'Not your business to follow my missie, you son of a pig!' Then they make big quarrel, and Pishasha try hard to get away from Houssain and bite Periyar."

"Missie went home, of course, and left them to fight it out."

"No, sar; our missie never allow fighting. She hold up her hand and cry out like colonel gentleman to sepoys, 'Stop! stop! This is all too much bad talk. Periyar, go back to the bungalow!' But Periyar never moving; he shake his hand at Pishasha and say very angry, 'That monkey must be killed; devil his name; devil he is; a wicked devil!' Then Houssain, with proper abuse for that pig Periyar, cry that he shall not be killed; and again they make big quarrel. Missie scolding again, and they come more quiet. Periyar's yed paining plenty too much; so he stop quarrelling and say, 'I go home now to get medicine. Afterwards I kill that monkey.' Houssain lift hand and spread out all his fingers—so!"

The boy imitated the gesture with a flash of real hatred in his dark eyes, drawing his lips back and showing a gleam of white teeth not unlike the monkey itself.

"Houssain say like this: 'You kill monkey, I kill you!' After Periyar done gone feeling plenty sick, Houssain touch Pishasha with kind hand and make him quiet and not want to bite any more. Missie say, 'How is this, Houssain? Why Periyar follow me into jungle? Why Pishasha angry and throw stone?' 'Can't say; that Periyar a very bad man. Monkey love missie; he thinking that dog of a Hindu going to hurt our missie.' 'Periyar never wanting to hurt me,' missie say. 'Then why following missie like leopard?' Houssain ask, getting angry again; and he pat monkey kindly and tell him in Hindustani that he is very good boy. Missie shake her yed and

look sorry and say, 'I'm afraid you must send Pishasha away.' 'Can't send him away; he cry and cry and cry.' Again missie shake yed. 'He mustn't stop here. Periyar will beat and hurt poor Pishasha!' 'Then I will kill him,' Houssain say. 'No, Houssain, no! That is wrong. Mustn't kill. You find another place for Pishasha; I pay for food.' But Houssain not liking that way, he say, 'Pishasha die in another place! And what for? Only to please that dog of a heathen, Periyar! Can't send Pishasha away!' Water coming into Houssain's eyes and into monkey's eye, and all because of that son of a pig. May Allah torment him!"

The boy spoke with the full force of inherited race hatred. It ran as strongly in his veins as in the blood of his uncle.

"And so Houssain had to send the monkey away."

"That night there was another big quarrel. Butler stop it and tell Houssain Pishasha must go by missie's order. Next morning Houssain walk down the ghat plenty crying. Pishasha cry too. All day long I cry, too, in empty go-down. In seven days' time Houssain come back with another monkey, which he call Pishasha."

"He was black when he came, wasn't he?" asked Warborough.

"Black, same like bear. Now he same like other Pishasha."

"Is this other monkey friends with Periyar?"

"No, sar; he scold and show teeth like last monkey. I thinking he brother to old Pishasha."

"Very much brother, unless I'm mistaken," said Warborough, remembering the predilection of the native of India for hair dye. "Where is the monkey? I don't see him anywhere."

"Gone for a walk up the hill with Houssain."

It was a proud and happy Abdul who was thus permitted to gossip about his mistress and her dependents. He had the undivided attention of the big English gentleman, and would have liked to continue his tales; but he stopped suddenly and began to busy himself with cleaning out the pan that had contained Teddy's breakfast of boiled rice. He used a tuft of coarse grass which he had pulled up by the roots, and with it he scoured the vessel inside and out till it shone again.

Warborough looked round for the cause of this abrupt application to business on the part of the Muhammadan boy, and found himself confronting the Hindu of whom they had just been talking.

CHAPTER VIII

WARBOROUGH'S eyes rested on the man with a sudden close scrutiny. Before the Hindu could resent it the glance had softened and become merely thoughtful. Then followed the habitual blankness. It all passed so swiftly that the Asiatic was not sure whether he had seen aright. The scrutiny was mutual, but with the Hindu there was no transition. It remained, and Periyar continued to gaze at the Englishman with the suspicion and distrust of a wild animal that does not know if the stranger may be reckoned as a friend or foe. Warborough spoke, and his manner and tone set his companion at rest.

"The lady is good to all alike, and she has many pensioners," he remarked, looking at Teddy.

"She is very kind, too kind to some," was the reply, as the speaker let his glance fall upon the stooping figure of Abdul, who continued to rub and scour as if he had no other object in life. There was evil in the face of Periyar as he watched the boy. He nursed more than one grievance against Houssain and his nephew.

When Nonia was first installed at Chamra House she found Periyar acting in the capacity of gardener as well as watchman. His work was unsatisfactory and his absence without leave too frequent to please a true lover of a garden. In addition he resented and obstructed every improvement that she tried to introduce. He allowed the newly imported plants to die from neglect, and refused to water, saying

that he already had more work to do than he could get through.

Like many others before him, he had adjudged her weak and easily imposed upon. It came as a surprise to find that she could be strong. He was summarily dismissed as gardener, and another man was hired with a promptitude that astonished him. Even in those early days Nonia had begun to turn to Houssain for help in carrying out her wishes. She requested him in such a way as to make it an order to find another gardener. This the old pensioner did; and when it was too late Periyar discovered that he had lost one of the best billets on the hills that a man of his trade could hope to find.

His successor was allowed to have the assistance of two helpers; no questions were asked as to the disposal of the surplus produce; and the supply of English seeds—a highly-prized boon among native gardeners in the East—was unlimited. The sight of the vegetable garden was a constant source of mortification to the man. He was obliged to grow his own stuff from native seeds. He had only to cast his eye over the boundary hedge to see the difference between the two gardens and note the better results from the English seed.

Periyar's resentment was not directed so much against the man who had supplanted him as the man who had introduced the supplanter. Houssain, the Muhammadan, was the offender in his opinion. He had acted unfairly in lending himself to the ousting of a fellow-servant. When the young mistress commissioned him to find another gardener, he should have declared it to be impossible; he should have delayed and made excuses until the garden was overrun with weeds. Flowers and shrubs would very soon have grown out of hand in that wonderful climate.

In sheer despair the new missie would have received Periyar back.

Then there was the episode of the monkey as related by Abdul. Periyar would bear the mark of the stone—hurled at him with surprising force from the top of the big boulder under which he was lurking—for the rest of his life. In this respect also his resentment was directed against Houssain, the owner of the monkey, whom he held responsible for the attack.

The deep race hatred of the conquered for the conqueror on one side and the contempt of the stronger race for the weaker on the other was bred in the blood of the two men. The antagonism smouldered unceasingly beneath the sullen silence and restrained bearing that they were forced to adopt. Neither would trust himself to express what he felt towards the other. Safety lay solely in keeping their distance and avoiding any collision that might necessitate speech. If looks could have killed, however, they would have slain each other long ago.

Warborough understood the conditions and knew what was meant when Periyar declared that his mistress was too kind to some of her pensioners. He had no intention of listening to any criticism on Miss Armscote, and he moved away without making any comment. As he slowly descended the turf steps towards the house, the dogs, as usual, came from the back verandah to give him a welcome. Glancing round, he observed that Periyar had followed, and he turned to speak to him.

"By-the-by, I wonder if you can tell me where the path leads that runs through the shola?"

"It leads to the top of the hill, your honour," replied the man in Hindustani.

"Is it a shorter way to Kotagiri than by the road?"

"No, sir; it is longer. If your excellency would like

to walk through the shola and on to the top of the hill, this slave will gladly show the way."

"Have you no work to do here?"

"None, sir, except such as may be done to-morrow. The honourable lady who lives here was taught by Houssain to hate this poor worm and account him to be unworthy as a servant; thus was I driven from the garden that was like my own, and that I have kept for so many years."

"Why do you stop here if you have no work to do?" asked Warborough, coldly.

"My master, the house-owner, looks to me to protect his property, and to see that these budmashes of servants and gardeners employed by the honourable lady, who knows nothing of their true characters, do not cut the trees or break down the fences."

Warborough moved on slowly, speaking as he walked. "If you have nothing better to do this morning, you may come with me and show me the path through the jungle and where it leads."

He pulled out a couple of rupees and gave them to the man without explanation. The black eyes gleamed at the sight of silver, and the manner of the Hindu softened; his grievances were forgotten in the unexpected discovery of a new source of wealth. To act as guide to the Englishman might be advantageous in more ways than one.

Warborough was about to tell his syce to wait at the house till he returned, when Periyar suggested that the man might lead the horse up the valley to a point where the honourable gentleman could find it without coming all the way back to the house. Having given the necessary directions, they retraced their steps to the terrace on which the animals were housed; and Periyar, at the Englishman's request, led the way.

They passed through a belt of wild shrubbery of gum

trees. A little ravine divided the shrubbery from the jungle of the shola. As soon as they left the shade of the eucalyptus, the undergrowth became thick and tangled; and it was not possible to make any progress except by an indistinct footpath, which was often not distinguishable to Warborough's inexperienced eyes.

Halfway up the hill Periyar turned aside, and Warborough found himself standing on a cleared opening with rock beneath his feet. A great mass of gneiss rose up among the trees like the wall of a medieval castle. Ferns and moss and wild balsams clung to the crevices and long trails of creeper hung over its face. Upon the perpendicular wall itself no herbage found foothold.

They stepped up to the edge of the precipice and Warborough drew in his breath sharply at the unexpected panorama that opened out before his eyes. On his left, the Hoolicul Droog lay in the distance with the plains beyond; Coonoor nestled at his feet, embosomed in trees and flowers. Dodabetta, bare and rugged, towered above on his right.

Immediately below was Chamra House, with its brilliant patch of garden. He could distinguish the terrace on which stood the shed occupied by Nonia's happy family. Teddy, a black spot at that distance, still sat up waiting for release. Abdul had vanished, but Houssain was there, and it seemed probable that Teddy's hopes of a walk would soon be realized.

Periyar moved on and Warborough followed. They plunged again into the shola; and after another long climb over rough steep ground that showed no indication of a path, they emerged from the jungle and came out upon a wide stretch of open moorland. The Englishman, with the instinct of the true sportsman, swept the new horizon with one swift glance. To his left some two hundred yards away, he caught sight of three men, natives dressed as Tamils,

disappearing by another entrance into the shola he had just left. They were out of sight immediately. Periyar, whose eyes had been in the opposite direction, did not see them.

"Is there any other path leading from the top of the hill down through the shola?" asked Warborough, indifferently.

"No, sir; this is the only path, and it is very little used, as you can see for yourself, so little that it is impossible for a stranger to find it without a guide."

"If the path is not a short cut, there seems no object in using it," he remarked, as he turned over the reasons Periyar might have for deceiving him by saying that there was no other way through the jungle.

He looked at the shola with its sharply defined limits standing like a wall of vegetation on the coarse grass land. It seemed as impervious and as monotonous in form as a veritable wall of bricks and mortar. Even though they had only moved a step or two from the spot whence they had emerged, he could not have defined it with any certainty. To strike into the forest haphazard would only have resulted in being entangled in a maze of ravine and precipice, or obstructed by boulder and bramble. Again and again he searched the edge of the shola in vain to find the place where he had seen the men enter, and the opening from which he and Periyar had come upon the moorland.

A cold wind blew across the open country—a wind that had gathered freshness from the mists. It caught his eyes with a sudden sting. His senses grew keener and his brain cleared under its touch. The garden was forgotten, with its birds and butterflies, its idle bees and glowing flowers. He was filled with an exhilaration that might have been produced by a draught of soma, the nectar of the Indian gods. Visitors to the Nilgiris know it, and call it the

champagne of the Blue Mountains. Although he had climbed steadily for the best part of an hour, he felt no fatigue.

As he looked across the undulating moorland of coarse grass, rock, and scrub, he felt the call of the open country, and was conscious of a strong desire to shake off his companion and strike out on a bee-line for the little station that lay only seven miles away from the spot where he stood. He regretted that he had not sent his horse back to its stable and so left himself free to follow his inclinations. By the present arrangement he was tied to keeping his appointment, so that man and beast might get home for the midday meal. Periyar's voice broke in upon his meditation, dispersing a half-formed resolution to dismiss his guide with a message.

"This way, sir," said the Hindu, as though he divined the unspoken wish. "We go round this way. The horse will be waiting below the hill over there."

He pointed in the direction of the road and began to walk. After a short pause, scarcely perceptible, Warborough followed the man. He could come up the hill again at any time and explore as he chose. They were moving in a slanting direction with the shola on their left, increasing the distance between themselves and the forest with each step. Neither spoke a word, Warborough preferring to use his eyes to lending his ears to tales which he doubted. The pathway Periyar pursued was of the nature of a cattle track. It skirted boulders and swampy patches and crossed little depressions in the moorland, always climbing back to the summit of the ridge, from which a glorious view was to be seen. In the far distance the hills were almost as blue as the sky. The nearer slopes were patched with fields of emerald green grain, marked out in irregular patterns. Lower down in the valleys the huts

of the hillmen were clustered into hamlets, and round them were plantations of gum trees. Elsewhere the hills were broken up into precipices, boulders and slab rock, diversified with grass and bracken and sholas.

A party of hillmen advanced towards them. They were spare, wiry men, walking with a springing, noiseless step, never altering their pace, whether moving up or down-hill. Each was enveloped in a coarse sheet that served as a wrap during the morning, a loin-cloth at midday, and a sleeping sheet at night. They moved in a straggling line like their own small cattle, not two abreast.

Seeing an Englishman, they stepped aside into the knee-deep bracken, salaaming as Warborough passed, and greeting his guide in their own tongue. Apparently the Hindu was known to them. They grinned familiarly, showing fine sets of white teeth as a few sentences were exchanged. What the joke was Warborough could not make out, as he did not understand their hill language.

The last man carried a covered basket, which he opened as he came up with Warborough. It was full of coarse country-made cigars. He asked in broken English if the honourable gentleman would buy some. Periyar answered without waiting for a reply that the excellency did not smoke. The man's face fell, and the smile of anticipation died away in disappointment, as it might have died on the face of an expectant child. Warborough, with an impulse that was unusual in him, produced a rupee, at which the white teeth gleamed again, and the man handed him a bundle of twenty-five small cigars.

Warborough smiled with amusement; the trail of the serpent stretched even to the hills; a rupee would have bought a hundred such in Coonoor. It was evident that the countryman knew quite as well as the townsman how to take advantage of the stranger.

Periyar spoke again in the hill tongue, and Warborough surmised from his tone that he was reproaching the Budaga for his imposition. The man only laughed as he knotted the rupee in a corner of the calico that formed his turban; and he went on his way in the wake of his companions, who had not waited for him.

"Your honour must throw the cigars away. They are common cigars, only fit for natives. The hillman does not understand the taste of an Englishman," the Hindu said.

"Oh, that's all right," replied Warborough easily. "I'm not going to smoke them myself. As you said just now, I don't smoke. By the way, how did you know?"

They were walking on again, following a rough, steep path obstructed by many boulders.

"Master never leaves cigar-ends or ashes in the garden." They arrived at a point from which the road was visible. "There is your honour's horse. The syce will be glad to have the cigars if master does not want them."

Warborough looked in the direction indicated by Periyar and caught sight of the animal and its groom. The man was squatting under the horse's nose, his head bent upon his knees, the reins fastened to his wrist in such a way that any movement on the part of his charge must have roused him out of his slumber.

Along a cart track leading from Wellington came a party of English soldiers, swinging over the ground at a steady pace two and three abreast, a striking contrast in gait and manner to the hillmen who had passed higher up. They were talking together and laughing noisily over some joke made by the wit of the party. It was repeated loudly to those in the rear, and they shouted back their appreciation. They turned into the road and walked on towards the bend in the highway where the horse was waiting.

Periyar led the way down through a steep and thickly-wooded ravine. They reached the road; then he stopped and pointed to a precipice of rock higher up the valley. It was a great wall rising sheer and perpendicular from a thick tangle of trees, wild guavas and weatherworn shrubs linked together with strands of leafy creeper. Pale grey, orange, and bronze-green lichens blotched the face of the dark gneiss. Here and there silvery drops of water oozed from mossy clefts and trickled down in broad lines of moisture, blackening the rock where it lay in deep shadow and silvering it in the sunlight. In crevices close to the edge of the dripping springs delicate ferns marked the precipice with streaks of green. A gaunt old forest tree, the last of its race, looked over the edge and stood up in strong outline against the azure of the sky.

"This is where the ghosts wait and watch over the gold that was brought from Mysore. Has master ever seen them?" said Periyar.

"Not that I know of. Where was the gold hidden?"

"In caves between this and Dodabetta. The ghosts fly from here," he pointed to the precipice, "dragging bits of cloud with them. They creep over the hills behind Wellington and hang round the Sugar Loaf hill that sits at Dodabetta's feet. Sometimes they call to each other. Has your honour heard them call?"

"How can I tell whether what I have heard is the voice of a ghost or a hyæna?"

"There are no hyænas here," said Periyar contemptuously.

"I was told at the club that one was shot near the Sugar Loaf eighteen months ago."

"Maybe, sir; but when Houssain talks of hyænas to the missie it is fool talk. He has no sense! One day he will meet a hyæna that is made like a misty cloud. For all

its mistiness it will strangle him if he goes near the unknown place where the treasure is hid. When the spirits call in this valley, those beyond the Sugar Loaf hear and answer back that they too are keeping watch." Periyar lowered his voice as he continued. "Your honour has bestowed on his servant a gift. In return let this slave give one little word of caution. The spirits that guard treasure in this country are evil. They are not to be trusted. They kill by strangling. They have power only from sundown to sunrise. Master will be wise if he walks here by daylight."

As Warborough listened his eyes scanned the wall of rock from the old tree on its summit to the tangle of jungle that covered boulder and rifts at its base. A bed of yellow St. John's wort grew close to him. Beyond stretched bracken waist-deep, covering the rough broken slope with a smooth carpet of green; and close under the rock was jungle. Masses of feathery wattle, richly golden in the morning sun, flourished on the other side of the road, where the ground fell away by a gentle slope to a small mountain stream. The breeze shook out the tiny buds into clusters of fluffy balls, and the branches bowed under the weight of yellow bloom. The sweet scent of the homely willow-catkin hung in the air and brought vague memories of April lights and shadows in England; and he only half-heard the grave and ridiculous warning of his companion.

"That's all right, Periyar," he replied indifferently. "I'm not likely to be up here at night."

Strange people, these English! thought the Hindu. They see nothing but the weeds and jungle trees, dumb, voiceless things that do no one any good, unless, indeed the hunter is lying in wait for a tiger or lepoard.

"Does your honour ever look for game in these parts?"

"Sometimes, when I am walking; but I never see any.

You have no game about here. The Budagas and soldiers between them have driven it all away. Perhaps they have frightened away the white devils as well."

"We have a leopard about the hills on this side now and then. Leopards take long walks, like the cats, and master might meet one at any time—during the day," he added. Then, after a slight pause, he continued. "The ghosts will not run from the soldiers. Does your honour know what the men at Wellington say?"

"That they don't believe in them."

"No, sir; they call the white devils their brothers, and say that they are the spirits of the men who died in the cholera camp many years ago."

"Do the Budagas believe it too?"

"The Budagas know that it is not true. They know that the devils are the ghosts of the white giants who lived in the hills long before Haider Ali's time."

"That's a more likely story," commented Warborough. "How is it that there are no giants left?"

"They were driven out into the Mysore and Mahratta countries, where the gods turned them into hills of stone. Has your honour ever been on the other side of the big Mysore ditch? It was dug to serve as a protection against the giants. If your excellency should ever be in Mysore shooting black buck, it would be wise not to pitch the tent too near a stone hill. At night the giants may be heard crying under the ground to their brothers living here."

They had reached the road, and Warborough mounted his horse.

"Stay here," he said to the syce. "I shall ride up the road a little way before I go back to the hotel."

He nodded to Periyar and trotted off. The Hindu watched him till he was out of sight. Then he turned to the syce.

"Your master bought some cigars of a hillman. He may give them to you. If he does not do so, tell his servant to steal them; they are not fit for an Englishman to smoke. They are too strong. Do you understand?"

The syce wagged his head in assent. He comprehended all that was implied, and there was no need for further speech. The Hindu turned on his heel, and took the mountain path, climbing the hillside with as much ease as if he had been born a Budaga.

CHAPTER IX

Warborough put his horse into a sharp trot. The road rose at a gentle gradient, and the animal—tired with standing still so long—responded willingly to the touch on the reins. Warborough thought he might possibly overtake the party of soldiers he had noticed as he came down the path with Periyar, but they were nowhere to be seen. He pulled out a pair of field-glasses and ran his eye over the hills on both sides of the valley, in search of anything that might be caught by the camera, and also to satisfy an idle curiosity as to the way the men had gone. He was in the mood to take some pictures of the Toda buffaloes. They were semi-wild cattle, and he had been assured that they would charge anything in the shape of a horse, and attempt to gore it and its rider. For this reason no professional photographer was able to supply photographs of the animal. The difficulties only added to his keenness in the pursuit.

He drew a blank with his glasses except for small parties of men from Wellington who were spending their holiday in loafing on the hills above or strolling along the paths. Two or three carried green butterfly nets; several were sitting in the morning sun reading and smoking. He was about to turn his horse's head, when he caught sight of two Englishmen riding down the road towards him. As they approached he recognised Pensax and Lutterworth, the

assistant superintendent of police. They pulled up and greeted him; Pensax said, with a good-natured laugh—

"Looking for game, Warborough? You won't find any here; you must get on the other side of Dodabetta, or right away to the Koondahs for that."

"Thought I might see some Toda buffaloes—not to shoot, but to photograph," he added as he noticed a lifting of the eyebrow on the part of the police officer.

"Nasty vicious beasts!" said Pensax.

"That sounds as if you had been more fortunate than Warborough," said Lutterworth, with a laugh.

"You're right! Unfortunate, I call it! I was once badly cornered by a herd some way back from here. I was off the road and came suddenly on the brutes. They snorted like pigs and made for me."

"How did you escape?"

"That's the most humiliating part of the tale. I was rescued by a small imp not higher than my elbow. He heard me shouting and ran to my assistance. He hurled rocks at the brutes, and they simply turned tail and galloped off to a safe distance. It's wonderful how those small herd-boys manage the cattle. I believe they bully them if the truth were known."

"I shall know what to do, then, when I come across a herd," said Warborough.

"Anyway, don't take your horse among them if you have any regard for him," added Lutterworth. "The herd-boy imp might head a vicious old buffalo bull off you, but I doubt if he could save your horse."

"It's odd that they should dislike a horse to that extent. I never met any one who could tell me the reason," remarked Pensax.

"I suppose you rode straight up from Coonoor," said Pensax, presently.

"I walked part of the way and met the horse here."

Pensax looked at him with sudden curiosity and asked which path he had taken and how he found the way.

"I went through the shola at the back of Chamra House. Periyar the watchman acted as guide."

"Ah! I thought you must have had some one to show you the way. It's not easy to find when you get out of the shola and on to the moorland. I got hopelessly lost on the top of that hill one day. The clouds gather so quickly. It may be quite clear when you start going up, but it will be like a washhouse when you get up to the top. I was fog-bound for six mortal hours and chilled to the bone. By a lucky chance I fell in with some Budagas, or rather they fell in with me, for I daren't move for fear of rolling over a precipice. Those fellows can find their way in the most marvellous manner. They got back to the edge of the shola and followed it for some distance. Then they struck out over the moorland. We turned and twisted among boulders and over swampy bits and through beds of bracken, and they brought me out on this very road, but where I can't tell you; the fog was too thick."

Lutterworth asked Warborough if he had done any shooting, and the conversation ran on big game, and whether it was more exciting to shoot than to photograph. Warborough inclined to the latter, but Lutterworth, who had never used a camera, could not understand its fascinations.

"I say, Warborough," said Pensax, who had been silent for some time, "did you see any Budagas on the top of the hill as you came along?"

"I passed seven or eight of them."

"Which way were they going?"

"To Coonoor, I should say."

"Did they try to sell you anything?"

"One of them asked me to buy some cigars."

Pensax turned to Lutterworth with a little laugh of triumph.

"There! What did I tell you, Lutterworth? That's the same old woman who tried to sell me cigars!"

"It wasn't a woman; it was a man."

"You didn't buy any, I suppose? You don't smoke."

"Yes, I did; I got a few, just to help the man along."

"They aren't fit to smoke, I fancy," said Lutterworth. "Have you got them with you or did you throw them away?"

"They're in my pocket. I shall make a present of them to the syce when I get home."

"My dear fellow, don't do that!" exclaimed Lutterworth. "They're poisonous things, not fit for any man to smoke, European or native. Unless I'm very much mistaken, they're drugged with opium and ganja. Let me see one if you can get at it handy."

Warborough dived into his pocket and pulled out several. The bundle, loosely tied, had come undone. He put one into Lutterworth's extended hand, saying carelessly—

"You may have the whole lot if you like. If they're drugged, as you suggest, you may be sure I shan't give them to any of my men."

The assistant superintendent pulled up, and Pensax moved over to his side. Together they examined the cigar, unrolling the leaf and picking the inner tobacco to pieces.

"Poof! Disgusting stuff! Saturated with hemp and opium! It's simply poisonous. I wish I knew where the thing was made. They're so sharp; they won't let me catch them even selling, far less making the stuff."

He crumpled the fragments up in his hand and threw them on the ground. They put their horses in motion

again and proceeded at an easy trot until the road once more became too steep for anything but a walking pace. Warborough's syce fell behind unobserved, and carefully gathered up every bit of the condemned cigar, and hid it in his turban. Tobacco leaf of that kind served its purpose equally well, whether smoked or chewed.

"Where would that Budaga fellow find a market for the cigars?" asked Warborough when the pace allowed of conversation.

"In heaps of places," replied Lutterworth. "The Coonoor bazaar; among the servants of the English; among the railway people; with the native traders who buy them to sell elsewhere; in short, the Budaga can find purchasers with everybody but the English."

"What about the men at Wellington?" asked Pensax, with a laugh.

"I forgot them! The colonel seems to think that they've discovered the brand and have taken to it kindly. Very bad for them if they have."

"I suppose there's no doubt about the cigars being produced irregularly," said Warborough.

"And sold without a licence!" added Litterworth. "That's the mischief of it! Some one—we can't find out who it is—is making a pile, and he's cheating the revenue into the bargain. It's punishable—a heavy fine or imprisonment," replied the police officer.

"I shouldn't give the fellow the option of a fine if I were the magistrate," remarked Pensax.

Warborough's eyes wandered to the hills. The subject of smuggled opium had less interest for him than for his companions. Pensax noted the direction of his gaze.

"I suppose you had it beautifully clear up there this morning," he said.

"Couldn't have been clearer. What a lot of the eagle

and kite tribe there are on the top of the hills! I wonder what they live on?"

"Snakes and lizards; bandicoots and vermin of that sort; a dead buffalo calf for a treat now and then if the jackals are not before them," said Pensax.

"By the way, I saw no trace of the old mine as I came along," said Warborough.

"You'd have to go a good bit further on to find it," replied Lutterworth.

"Then it does exist? I've been told different tales about it. One says that there are old workings; others have declared there is no such thing as a gold-mine. You said so, didn't you, Pensax?"

"I've never seen anything of the kind. Of course, I haven't been everywhere. I only spoke from experience. I've been told so much that has turned out on inquiry to be fiction that I don't believe a word these natives say." He spoke in an aggrieved tone. "Do you know if it exists, Lutterworth?"

"It's there, right enough; but the place is so grown up with jungle that it is not easy to find. The machinery lies about the ground rusting—expensive stuff that must have cost the shareholders dear. It was never even set up. Their money was wasted!"

"Regularly thrown away," said Pensax. "Any one might have told them that there's no gold to be had in any paying quantity on these hills. One would have to go on to the Mysore plateau for that, and it's not to be worked even there except in a few places; too deep."

"Was a shaft ever sunk?" asked Warborough.

"Something of the kind was made," replied Lutterworth, "but I've never seen it. The natives tell me that it is difficult to get at. It's somewhere among the rocks in a ravine at the top of the hill. You have to climb over the

rocks and go through a passage or tunnel, and you find yourself in an enclosure not unlike, I gather from the description, the keep of an old castle. The shaft—if you can call it that—follows a very ancient working, and slopes at a gradient no steeper than what we are riding down now. The machinery was meant for a perpendicular shaft. It was no use for one that was nothing more nor less than a gallery. The owners fetched out a little ore by means of coolies, but it was slow work and expensive, as the men got pneumonia from the cold winds when they came out of the mine. The whole thing fizzled out. The manager and his assistant, finding themselves in arrears of salary, went off to the goldfields of Kolar. That was forty years ago or more; and ever since then the place has been deserted."

"You ought to find it, Warborough, and take some photographs," said Pensax.

"It doesn't appeal to me at all. I want life and movement, not ruins."

"Cinema films, eh?"

At which Warborough smiled and Pensax laughed boyishly at his own astuteness.

CHAPTER X

Early on the morning of the same day before the sun had mounted over the shoulder of the hills, Major Berringham was at Chamra House with the car by appointment. It did not take long for Nonia to seat herself by his side, and they slipped away down the road past Sim's Park to the racecourse. A mist brooded over the valley and the little stream was swollen and muddy with the night's rain.

The soldiers were already astir in their huts on the knoll above the course. One or two came out to look at the car as its hum reached their ears. Berringham was silent, his attention concentrated on the frequent bends of the narrow road. They climbed the hill towards Wellington and rounded the corner where on moonlight nights the syce's ghost still waits for his dead master, thrown from his horse higher up. At the fountain the road became level. They turned along the figure of eight and pulled up at the Castle, a house boasting of picturesque embattlements. Mrs. Oswald was ready, and in a few minutes more they had picked up Captain Devon, who was waiting by the barracks.

Another sharp dip into the valley, and a second stream was crossed, a stream that flows with a gentle purling past the soldiers' cemetery.

From the black bridge the car breasted the hill at a steady pace. As they mounted the incline they gained wider views. Bold headlands appeared on the horizon

with their sides broken with watercourses. The grass slopes were dotted with the brown and black cattle belonging to the Budagas, as lean and wiry as the red deer and black buck of the plateau.

By this time the sun was shining with slanting rays on the blossom of the melanoxylum and wattle, wet with the shower of the night. At a point known as the Half-way House—a collection of mud huts with one or two refreshment stalls for the native traveller—they had to slow down to pass a string of bullock-carts halted for the early breakfast of the drivers. The primitive break was formed of a single log of wood pressed closely against the wheels. Contact with one of these logs was liable to do more harm to the car than to the bullock-cart.

Nonia's eyes were everywhere. They scanned the patient stupid cattle slowly munching straw or lying down under the yoke as if the wings of time had ceased to beat.

"Oh! poor things!" she said. "I think the life of an Indian bullock is the saddest thing in this world. I wish I could give them a little pleasure."

Berringham was clear of the carts, and had an open road before him. He relaxed his attention and listened to his companion.

"Can't imagine any one wasting pity on a bullock in this country, nor in England either; there they are killed and eaten. Here they are only beaten."

"Poor things!" she murmured. "Do you think they're like horses and love sugar? There's some lump sugar in the tiffin basket——"

Berringham cast a glance of sheer alarm at her. "Oh! come! I say, Miss Armscote! You're not going to ask me to stop and feed the beasts with sugar!"

"I don't know; it would be very kind, very sweet of you," she answered, a twinkle in her eye.

"There's nothing I desire more than to be sweet and kind—to you; but ask me to show it in any other way."

"We shall meet another string of carts presently, and then you and I——"

Berringham uttered an exclamation of dismay. "Look here, Miss Armscote! You'll make me drive into the wall if you suggest such dreadful things. Can't we give the sugar to the next native babies we meet?"

They did not happen to meet any children, however, at that early hour, and fortunately for Berringham's peace of mind neither did they encounter any more bullock-carts. A syce passed down the road in charge of his master's horse. His own bundle of personal property, balanced by a second shapeless bundle of stable things belonging to his master, hung across the horse's back. As he strode down the ghat road at an easy pace he smoked a country-rolled cigar, happy in the thought that by sunset he would once more be breathing the warm air of the plains.

An Afghan trader with baggy trousers to the knee, his legs bandaged with strips of camel-hair cloth, came into view. He too was toiling down to the more congenial atmosphere of the plains. His face, like his body, had grown long and thin with a life of travelling and trading, and his eyes were like the eyes of the kite hovering over the crest of the hill above them. His mate had gone by train, smuggling down the wooden boxes of cashmere cloths and embroideries as the luggage of other men less burdened than himself; men who carried their effects tied up in a cotton handkerchief.

He salaamed as the car approached, and held up something for them to see.

"Oh! stop, Major Berringham! please stop!" cried Nonia, impulsive as usual. "Look! there's the sweetest

little mongoose in the world! Ask him if he will sell it."

The man grinned with the assurance and expectancy of the itinerant hawker.

"The lady may have the mongoose for ten rupees," he said readily in English, putting the tame little creature on the broad splashboard of the car. It ran up to Nonia, fearlessly inspecting her with feelers, and a pair of beady eyes. Gaining confidence, it stepped on to her lap and burrowed under the fur rug that covered her knees. The dirty bit of string by which its owner held it was stretched to its fullest extent.

"Ten rupees!" cried Mrs. Oswald from the seat behind. "It's too much, Miss Armscote. Will you take five?" she said, turning to the man.

"Can't take five," he replied, beginning to draw the animal by the string from its warm retreat.

"Oh! don't hurt it! poor little thing!" exclaimed Nonia. "I'll give you six rupees."

"Can't take six," answered the Afghan, with imperturbable good humour and a wider grin than ever. The string was drawn tighter still, and a hind leg appeared at the edge of the rug with a quivering tail.

"You're hurting it! you horrid man! I'll give you seven."

"Very sorry, can't let lady have it for seven. Very good mongoose this, killing plenty of snakes in Rajah's compound."

Again the string was tightened till the leg seemed in danger of dislocation, and the mongoose gave a little protesting squeak as it held on to Nonia's skirt with all its available claws. She felt the clinging touch of its feet upon her knees and responded to the appeal. Her sympathy was always roused on behalf of animal distress.

With a sudden twitch she possessed herself of the string, and the mongoose burrowed down again into regions of safety as it felt the tether relax.

"I'll give you eight rupees, not a pice more," she said.

"Five rupees more than it is worth. You had better take it," said Berringham to the Afghan.

"Master, please! I very poor man!" replied the trader as he held out his hand for the money—a five-rupee note and three silver coins which Nonia had taken out of her purse.

"The rascal!" said Mrs. Oswald as they drove on.

"They're all alike," replied Captain Devon. "If we hadn't been here he would have asked twenty rupees."

"And Miss Armscote would have given it if she thought the man was hurting the poor little thing."

The Afghan watched the wonderful carriage that ran without fire or horses, the grin remaining some time after they had disappeared round a bend in the road. He had bought the mongoose that morning for half a rupee from a servant who had stolen it from his master, and reported that it had broken its tether and got away. After secreting the money in different parts of his clothing the trader continued his downward journey.

"What are you going to do with that little beast all day?" asked Berringham, not altogether approving of the new purchase.

"It will stay with me and give no trouble. I once had a lovely mongoose just like this. It was killed by a jackal that I was keeping. I was so sorry to lose it, it had attached itself to me. All animals love me," she said as she fondled her pet and rearranged the nest in the warm rug.

"Quite so," returned Berringham. "The love is not confined to brute beasts. I know personally——"

"Oh! poor little ricki-ticki-tavi! did I hurt it!" cried Nonia, breaking in on his speech.

"What did you do?" asked Berringham, thrown off the scent.

"Caught its little tootsie in my woollen jacket."

A bullock-cart loomed in the distance. Berringham did not slow down. He preferred to take the risk of that protruding log break to giving his companion a chance of remembering her preposterous design of feeding the bullocks with lump sugar. Fortunately her attention was fully occupied with the latest favourite, and she had no eyes for anything else.

Higher and still higher the car climbed, the scenery spreading out before them with wonderful beauty under the morning light. The road remained the same in character with its low stone wall on one side protecting it from the valley below, and the rough hill rising abrupt and steep from the very road itself on the other. The manipulation of the steering gear kept Berringham busy, and conversation died down. Nonia turned to Mrs. Oswald and her companion, and they discussed local news over the back of the seat.

They were nearing Ootacamund, and had passed a forbidding cliff of dark grey gneiss. The distant hills were hidden behind masses of gum trees, foreigners, like the English, that have taken kindly to the soil and climate. Nonia caught sight of moon-white arum lilies growing wild in the swampy grass below the road, and masses of scented geranium by the wayside.

The houses of the English were reached, standing back from the road in a forest of heavily foliaged eucalyptus and full-skirted pines. Nonia glanced back at the house taken by the officers of the Royal Fusiliers in bygone years whilst Captain Devon told her the story of it. One of the

officers with a strain of the artist in his blood, painted the badge of the regiment—the Tudor rose and crown—on a signboard, and hung it up at the gateway. A globe-trotter visiting Ootacamund walked into the house and demanded whiskey and soda under the impression that he was patronising a Rose and Crown public house. The liquor was supplied in silence, and when he would have paid for it he was courteously bowed out by a magnificent Madras butler, who informed him that his masters, the officer gentlemen of Wellington, never charged their friends for their drinks.

They breakfasted at Sylk's Hotel, and then started to climb Dodabetta. The first stage was made with a pair of ponies and a small open carriage of antiquated build. They passed through the Government chincona plantations, along a deserted road, and came out upon the bare hillside, where the way was a mere shelf cut in the slope. The ponies, accustomed to taking out parties, plodded along the road quietly enough. At first the track was distinct, but after a while it lost its defining line and merged into the open moorland of the head of the mountain. The driver pulled up, declaring his inability to drive any further.

"Shall I carry the mongoose in my pocket, Miss Armscote?" asked Devon.

"No, thank you; Ricki is quite happy here."

They were walking off together when Mrs. Oswald stopped, saying to Devon—

"Would you be so kind as to get me my waterproof cloak out of the carriage? Go on, Major Berringham; don't wait for me. I dare say I shan't get quite as far as you do; I'm not a good climber."

This suited Berringham exactly. So far, he felt that luck had not been with him. He hoped that now it was

turning in his favour. At breakfast he had been obliged to devote some of his attention to his colonel's wife. Devon was quite ready to make the most of his opportunity, and he and Nonia had had a good deal of chaff between them, and were the best of friends. It crossed his mind once or twice that Devon was attracted in that quarter, and he determined that he would arrange for a different set of partners when they got out into the open on lonely Dodabetta. Mrs. Oswald was inclined to help him in his design, and he acted on her suggestion with alacrity.

"There's a bit of a walk before us, do you mind?" he said, as he stepped out by Nonia's side as far as the rough ground would allow.

"Not a bit, it's beautifully fresh up here after Coonoor and Wellington. I feel as if I could walk miles and miles. Oh! do look at Ooty! Isn't it lovely?"

Below them lay the hill station with its lake set in dark green woods of firs and gums. White houses half hidden in their bowers of garden and shrubbery seemed in the clear atmosphere only a stone's throw from them. Above the fir and eucalyptus groves came the indigenous forest, following the lines of hidden ravines. The sholas stretched almost to the travellers' feet, a few grey-stemmed rhododendrons stood away from the dense forest edge in the rough grass. For all their wind-tossed appearance the sturdy old rhododendrons had but a few weeks ago covered themselves with a gorgeous mantle of crimson. Some of the rosy cups were still staining the grass beneath the trees.

Beyond Ooty Nonia caught sight of the downs spreading away to the north-west in gentle undulations. The morning sun flooded their smooth surface with light, and gave the grass a surface like satin.

"Have you ever hunted over there?" asked Berringham.

"Rather! What splendid going it was! When once I had started I forgot all about the wretched little jackal that we were hunting. I'm glad to think that it got away over those downs, and I hope it's alive to this day."

"You are much too tender-hearted. How do you know that the jackal doesn't enjoy the run as much as the field?"

"Oh, Major Berringham! how can you suggest such a thing? If I am too tender-hearted you err on the other side."

"Indeed I don't—where you are concerned."

"Look at the Koondahs. Aren't they grand? It was worth coming up here to see them alone."

Her eyes rested on the mountain range painted this morning in pearly blue. Masses of grey and golden cloud, heavy with moisture, broke the line of the hills, but did not obscure them. Piles of thunder-cloud heralded the coming monsoon which would break over Coonoor later. Mackurta peak, rivalling Dodabetta in height, stood out on the horizon, its graceful lines sharp and clear. To the east the tablelands of Mysore lay under a warm blue haze, the level horizon blending with the vapours above.

"It's beautiful! beautiful! I'm so glad I came," said Nonia in a sudden burst of enthusiasm. She felt as if she wanted to sing and dance, with Nature for her partner; to stretch her arms towards hill and cloud, forest and rock, with a salutation of praise; to proclaim their inimitable beauty and worship with her whole heart. The man by her side failed to understand, and in so failing only widened the distance between them that he fain would have bridged.

"Have you never been here before?" he asked.

"Never!" she replied, with a catch in her voice, as she involuntarily moved on ahead as though to shut him out

of sight. He followed closely, speaking of himself instead of the scene that had cast its spell over her.

"Then I am lucky to have had the privilege of showing you one of the finest sights in South India. How I should like to take you up north where you would see the eternal snows! Do you think——"

She bounded over a small boulder, putting her foot on the top and jumping away from him. The mere thought of seeing the eternal snows with him by her side jarred. She felt as if he had wiped away with a wet cloth half the beauty of the landscape they were looking at. She glanced back in the direction of Ootacamund.

"Do tell me, Major Berringham, if it is true that the largest house in Ooty was occupied last season by a Maharajah's dogs?"

"I believe it's true."

"The dear dogs! How they must have enjoyed themselves! Can't you fancy the boar hounds quarrelling over the biggest lounge; and the fox terriers appropriating the sofa cushions; and the luxurious dachshunds snapping at each other over the snuggest corners on the sofa? Then at night! Think of them appropriating all the beds from the spare-room downward!"

"Brutes! I should like to have given them a taste of the whip," growled Berringham.

"I suppose the Maharajah will take another house for his cows, and perhaps a third for his poultry, and a fourth for his pigs. By-the-bye, do Marahajahs keep pigs?"

"Something ought to be done about putting these houses to such uses," said Berringham, who with many other Englishmen disliked the idea of the best houses on the hills—formerly the scene of generous hospitality and memorable social gatherings—being allowed to fall into the hands of rich natives, and to be put to such a different

use. Nonia was not ignorant of the opinion Berringham held on the subject, and was purposely diverting him from his object.

"The Maharajah bought the house, I understand," she said; "if that is the case, I really don't see why he should not keep dogs or monkeys or bears or a happy family of all three if he likes in his own house."

"Five or six of the best Ooty houses have come into the hands of natives," grumbled Berringham, who had no intention of being led into a discussion of the rights and wrongs of the matter.

"I was told that they all paid handsomely for their properties," said Nonia, who was hurrying forward towards the rounded head of the mountain, hoping to get a peep of Coonoor and Wellington.

The ground was rough, and she had to pick her way as she could, unassisted by any sign of footpath. Her line was erratic. She stopped frequently to look at the distant view or to pluck a pink orchis from a bed of damp moss among the stones. It was impossible to keep abreast with her, and equally impossible to carry on any consecutive conversation. No sooner had he overtaken her than she darted on again, leaving him to follow as best he could; and he was neither quite so young nor quite so agile as she was. A big boulder barred her way, and Berringham, coming up with her, took her elbow in his hand with the intention of guiding her round the obstructive rock.

"This way, not that, or you will be ankle-deep in swamp. There was rain last night, and Dodabetta had more than its share."

She turned at his touch and took the line he pointed out. He did not release her arm, and she made no effort to free herself. Did she know that he was longing to lay

his big clumsy loving heart at her feet and pray for permission to worship? Because she had smiled at him and thanked him prettily for any little service he had been able to offer, he was buoyed up with hope and believed that he had only to ask, to obtain his heart's desire. He was wealthy, of good birth, popular; he had been made much of by his mother and sisters and by women to whom the car and other benefits were a consideration. Mothers with daughters smiled at him. No one, not even his colonel, snubbed him. So poor Berringham blundered on, able to see the swamps and quagmires of Dodabetta, but utterly blind to the obstacles that beset the path of his own happiness.

"Miss Armscote!" his grasp on her elbow tightened, and she gave a little breathless gasp which any man less absorbed in himself might have observed and taken for a warning. "Miss Armscote! May I speak——"

He was doomed to disappointment and interruption. Before he could say another word Ricki jumped out of the pocket where he had been asleep, and lighted on his four feet on a slab of rock which they were passing.

"Oh! Oh!! Oh!!!" cried Nonia. "Catch him, Major Berringham! Catch him! I shall never forgive myself if he gets away! Ricki! Ricki! dear little Ricki! If you only knew! Darling! do let yourself be caught! Think of the eagles, dear. You'll be eaten for supper this very evening if I leave you here!"

In between each sentence she made a little run that ended in an ineffectual pounce. Berringham went round to the other side of the rock and grabbed for all he was worth with no better success, his own personal affairs forgotten for the moment in the sudden emergency. A shout distracted their attention. It came from Devon. He and Mrs. Oswald had stopped, and she was seated on

a boulder. Devon pointed to a brown-grey cloud lowering over the nearest range, and turning it from a cerulean blue to a deep purple. From the Coonoor side of Dodabetta wisps of vapour curled upwards creeping towards the head of the mountain, and the wind swept past with a cold breath that made the rhododendrons shiver with a faint rustle. Ooty was still bathed in a broad band of sunlight stretching upwards almost to the spot where Mrs. Osborne sat. The old trees in the shola seemed to lift their heads in gratitude to the warm greeting. A rumble of distant thunder sounded a note of warning which saved Devon the trouble of shouting further explanation.

Ricki, finding he was no longer pursued, sat up and washed his face with his paws. Berringham made a dash and captured the little scamp out of hand.

"If we don't want to be caught in a shower we had better make tracks for the carriage at once. Take your latest favourite, Miss Armscote, and let me tie the string to his leg again as a warning."

"Oh! no! we need not be so cruel. I'll put him back in my pocket and button the flap down so that he can't get out. Thank you so much for catching him. It would have been too terrible to have had to leave him up here."

"Considering that the little beast would have been more or less on his 'native heath,' I don't think he would have needed your pity. You should keep your pity for creatures that are really suffering."

Nonia was moving swiftly through the rough grass, and stepping over loose stones, keeping ahead of Berringham. She stopped and looked back at the gathering storm with its ragged fringes and swirling vapour. Dodabetta's head was already under a thick cloud.

"I am sure that Ricki would suffer if he were turned

loose in such wild country as this—and he would get so wet," she concluded, as she resumed her walk.

Conversation was not easy, and they relapsed into silence. When they were a couple of hundred yards from the carriage a rumble of thunder over the top of the mountain startled Nonia, and she began to run, jumping lightly over obstructions in her path which Berringham —not so young and of a heavier build—had to negotiate more carefully. Mrs. Oswald had reached the carriage and was already taking her seat, Devon arranging the rug over her knees in preparation for the downpour that seemed imminent.

A sharp exclamation of pain caused Nonia to stop and look round. To her dismay Berringham was seated on a tussock of grass nursing his ankle, his face twisted with pain; his hat, which had fallen off, was lying on the ground by his side.

CHAPTER XI

"SPRAINED my ankle, like a fool! slipped up on a bit of rock. Please ask Devon to come and help me," Berringham said, in reply to Nonia's question as she hurried back to his side.

"I'll do it! I'll help you along!" she replied, extending her hand to raise him to his feet. "There! do you think you can manage to walk? Don't be afraid to lean upon me. I can bear any weight."

Not at all averse to accepting her help, he slipped his arm in hers and moved slowly to the carriage. Devon, observing that something was wrong, came at once to the rescue. Between them Berringham was led safely to where the ponies waited, and took his seat by Mrs. Oswald's side. The other two jumped in, and they started off at a smart pace down the mountain road without further delay.

"How did you manage to hurt your foot?" asked Mrs. Oswald with some concern.

"Trying to play follow-my-leader with Miss Armscote over the rocks."

"I'm so sorry," said Nonia, repentantly, as she contemplated the mischief she had indirectly caused. "I began to run because I was afraid we should be caught in the rain. I don't mind the rain. It is the thunder and lightning that I can't endure. I don't mind confessing that I am a veritable coward in a thunderstorm. I am so sorry."

Berringham beamed with satisfaction. At last he had succeeded in rousing her pity. Ricki was forgotten, and his own misfortune entirely occupied her thoughts. He admired his own crafty way of throwing the responsibility on to her shoulders, and he wished that he had brought about something of the kind before.

Justice, however, must be done. Berringham had twisted his ankle in good earnest, and it was purely the result of an accident. The rocks were indeed slippery with their patches of moss, and the going extremely rough. The injury was slight. The only deception he could be accused of was in making more of the incident than was necessary. In this he might be excused. All is fair in love and war. A good opportunity should not be lost of enlisting her pity, and perhaps evoking something more.

They had not left the summit of the mountain a minute too soon. The cloud spread rapidly, covering the spot where they had so lately stood. The outpost rhododendrons were already enveloped in drenching mist, and were dripping crystal drops of moisture from every leaf. The thunder rolled round Dodabetta's sides and opened the floodgates of the clouds.

Nonia looked back at the heights, fascinated by the purple-grey cloud that had been only white mist while they were in touch with it. She could no longer distinguish the boiling vapour that had swirled with perpetual motion as it dropped down upon the brow of the hill. The cloud seemed motionless at that distance, dense and mysterious, occasionally riven by a thin jagged line of electricity, which split up into dazzling threads that must have played among the branches of the old rhododendrons. Did they never get struck? Were they never smitten with fear as the thunder roared in their ears? Were they

deaf to the noise and insensible to the icy cold rain? How could that be when they responded to the touch of the sun's rays? They felt the magic of tropical heat and answered in a glory of crimson blossom; then, of course they must also have some sentient knowledge of the stress of storm and wind.

Berringham, watching her face as she sat on the seat in front of him, wondered what she was thinking of. There was sympathy in the eyes that rested on the cloud, and with the vanity of the ordinary man he claimed it for himself. She was sorry for him, and would make amends by and by. Happy in the thought, he was content to remain silent.

"After all I don't think we shall have any rain," remarked Mrs. Oswald when they reached the hotel. "Now for a little lunch, and then we must start homewards. I have the members of the ball committee coming to tea and to a meeting."

When the car came up Berringham professed his readiness to drive. Though he had sprained his ankle he declared that his head and hands were as sound as ever—and heart, he added in a lower tone as Nonia chanced to pass close by.

"What about the break? Can you manage that by yourself?" asked Mrs. Oswald, who, not possessing a motor of her own, was apt to be nervous.

"Quite well, I assure you. Miss Armscote can help me if I should be in any difficulty."

"Captain Devon will do that," replied Mrs. Oswald, decisively. "Miss Armscote will sit with me behind."

There was a fly in the ointment after all! and Berringham began to repent him of his careless jump on the rock. He saw Devon every day of his life, and had no desire at that precise moment for his companionship. However,

there was nothing to be done but to submit. He looked at Nonia, half hoping that she would protest against the rearrangement of the seats, but she was occupied with Ricki, and had not heard apparently what Mrs. Oswald was saying.

"I am sure that I can drive all right, and I shan't want any help," he objected, rebelling in vain. Turning to Nonia he continued, "Won't you like to go back as we came? Captain Devon will not mind."

"But I shall," replied Mrs. Oswald, before Nonia could answer. "The road is more difficult going down than up, and I am not inclined to take any risks. If you should feel your foot very painful Captain Devon can manage in your place. I know he can drive, and I shall feel quite as safe with him as with you. Get in, Nonia, we must be off, or my committee will be minus its chairman."

The drive back was accomplished in safety, and the assistance of Devon was not required.

"How long will the committee meeting last?" asked Berringham, as he drew up at the Castle.

"I don't know exactly," replied Mrs. Oswald, with a glance that said plainly, "Why do you ask?"

"I should like to drive Miss Armscote back to her house," he said, in answer to the unspoken question.

"Please don't trouble. I am going to take her back myself. I promised to fetch my husband from the club, so that it will not be putting me to any inconvenience. You must go home and have your ankle attended to at once; cold-water bandages and all that sort of thing, you know, don't you, Captain Devon?" she added, turning to him and laying the responsibility of treatment on to his shoulders.

There was definite dismissal in her tone, and Berringham's face fell. It lighted up again as Nonia laid her hand in

his and thanked him for the pleasant day they had had. She also expressed a hope that he would soon recover; and again she was sweetly repentant for what she called her own carelessness.

"I feel that it is all my fault. I shall be wondering this evening whether you will be suffering. Oh! I do hope that you won't have any pain! It always goes to my heart to think of a creature in pain!"

The tone and manner were soothing, and Berringham's spirits revived. Mrs. Oswald's eyes rested on Nonia as she made this little speech, and doubt gathered in their depths. Did the girl know what she was doing? Had Berringham spoken? She thought not. Was Nonia supremely innocent and guileless? or was she nothing more nor less than a little minx?

"Anything that will keep me in your thoughts and show me the way to your heart, Nonia——" he said in a low tone, as Mrs. Oswald turned away and began to mount the steps of the verandah, Devon following with an armful of extra wraps and umbrellas.

Nonia's eyes suddenly twinkled with mischief. She drew forth the mongoose and thrust its wriggling body towards him with its four feet clawing the air, and cruelly interrupted his little speech with a command.

"Say good-bye to the darling! Isn't he sweet? Though I paid for him myself I shall always feel as if you had given him to me yourself, Major Berringham," she said with a laugh.

Berringham cursed his stupidity for not having insisted on settling with the Afghan himself, and of making her a present of the new pet. It was too late now; but the thought of the chance he had lost disturbed his mind and scattered his ideas. He was one of those slow-thinking men who always remember the right thing to say some

hours after the opportunity occurs; and when it might have been said to advantage.

Devon came running down the steps. He shook hands with Nonia and held her hand just long enough to whisper—

"Haven't had much chance of talking to you to-day. I say, keep a couple of dances for me at the ball."

"All right! I will. I love dancing with you."

It all came out so naturally and withal so innocently, and her eyes met his with such an honest look of *bon camaraderie* that the man who listened did not for a moment see in her words anything more than the pleasant anticipation of a couple of enjoyable dances. Yet as he took his place by Berringham's side a vision lingered in his memory that might possibly destroy his peace of mind if he allowed himself to dwell too long upon it.

Berringham had not heard the farewell request. He was busy manœuvring the car back to the road. This was another occasion when he ran a risk of being late for the fair. It did not enter his head that unless he spoke early he might not get as many dances as he desired.

He drove away silent and preoccupied, not quite sure whether he ought to be pleased on the whole with the result of the day's outing, or whether he should consider it a failure. In one respect it had been a complete failure. He had started out with the full intention of proposing. The course he had mapped out was commonplace and without any romance, romance being an impossible quality in a matter-of-fact nature like his. He intended to get her away from the other two, declare his love and ask her directly to marry him. Somehow or other he took it for granted that she would say yes. The assent might be faltering, but it would come. He had mentally fixed the time for the wedding, and shaped the spending of the

honeymoon in his mind. There was nothing to wait for. They might be married in a few weeks—leave had been due to him for some time past—and they would get home to England for the season.

When he came to think over the incidents of the day he discovered that though he had succeeded in separating her from the others and getting her to himself, there the proposed programme ended. The rest had not been carried out. He had failed to make effectual use of his opportunity. His declaration had hung fire somehow, and he had not said what he intended. It was disappointing, and he was at a loss to account for it.

It did not occur to his mind that Nonia herself had skilfully fenced the question and kept him at bay. He regarded her as a girl, young for her years, into whose life love had never entered. Her devotion to animals in his opinion was a sure indication that she had never been in love. Mrs. Oswald put it down to something else.

No; it was all his fault, he decided, his stupid fault that he had failed. He had made an initial mistake in trying to declare his love before he spoke of marriage. He ought to have asked her straight out to be his wife, and while he waited for the shy confused assent—of course it would have been shy and confused—he should have spoken of his love.

Devon noted his silence and preoccupation as they drove back to their quarters, a bungalow on the hill above the barracks, which they shared, and he smiled to himself. Poor old Berringham! he thought. I wouldn't give a rupee for his chances. She's anybody's prize. By George! I've half a mind to go in myself. A nice little fortune behind her if all is true that's said; and a most lovable little woman into the bargain. Rather fun capturing that wealth of love that she now lavishes on those brutes in

her happy family! By George! he murmured under his breath, as he conjured up a picture in which there were no "brutes," but something else to make the happy family.

Mrs. Oswald and Nonia had tea together before the members of the committee arrived. After a little chat over the morning's expedition, Mrs. Oswald said—

"I think Major Berringham seems rather attracted, Nonia." She looked at her guest as though she would find some answer to the query implied by the remark.

"Not more than he is to Pansy Cotheridge or any other girl," protested Nonia, easily, and not pretending to misunderstand her meaning. "He is always kind and good-natured. I know that most women imagine that a man is devoted as soon as he lets his natural kindness of heart show itself. I am not inclined to take anything of the sort as personal, so you need not be afraid that my feelings will be hurt."

"I was thinking of him, not of you," replied Mrs. Oswald, bluntly, and glancing at Nonia with a flash of suspicion that the girl was laughing at her; but there was nothing to show that she had spoken otherwise than in perfect seriousness.

"A man of his age ought to be able to take care of himself. He must be forty if he is a day."

The statement was made simply and with no trace of self-consciousness. Mrs. Oswald's suspicions were set at rest.

"And you? how old are you?" she asked.

"A little more than half his age."

There was a pause, during which Mrs. Oswald was turning over in her mind how far her duty as a friend warranted her in speaking in his behalf. It would have pleased not only herself, but the whole regiment, to have seen Berringham happily married to a girl like Nonia.

"Do you like him?" she asked, with another glance from the "truth-finders," as Ivy Cotheridge termed those searching eyes.

"Very much," responded Nonia, heartily, and without a moment's hesitation. "I think he is an old darling!"

"That's what he would like you to think; but perhaps without the qualifying adjective. You don't feel inclined to marry him?"

Nonia laughed and looked at Mrs. Oswald with amusement.

"How funny you are! Aunt Mary is always asking me if I feel inclined to marry; and she gives a great sigh of relief when I answer—no!"

"No! why don't you feel inclined to marry?" inquired Mrs. Oswald, in some surprise.

"Why should I marry?"

Mrs. Oswald was not prepared to say on the spur of the moment. She asked why Miss Madersfield heard with relief that Nonia did not wish to marry.

"Auntie thinks I am happy enough as I am."

"What does your uncle think?"

"My uncle? Oh, Colonel Tredmere? He is an old bachelor himself, and he used to counsel me to be cautious. 'Wait! do nothing in a hurry,' he was constantly saying."

Then he had seen her flirting, thought Mrs. Oswald. After all, Nonia was a minx and not a child.

"He was right, of course, but no one can say that you have been hurried since you have been in Coonoor. Isn't it time you considered the question? After all, marriage is the crowning point in a woman's life."

"Isn't that rather an obsolete notion? In these days the crowning point in a woman's life is said to be the attainment of complete independence," said Nonia, with an unseen twinkle in her downcast eyes.

Mrs. Oswald was quite sure that Nonia belonged to the minx species. She answered warmly—

"We are under the impression that we have attained independence as soon as we have married."

"An antiquated notion that modern women are growing out of fast," rejoined Nonia. She said it so sweetly that Mrs. Oswald could only laugh, although inwardly she repeated the assertion that she was undoubtedly a minx! there was no question about it! Nonia continued, "Old wives' tales die hard, you know." (Old wives' tales, indeed!) "But, of course, we mustn't be in a hurry to kill old superstitions about marriage. Somehow there is a sweet smell of lavender about them that makes them very fascinating to contemplate."

Mrs. Oswald looked at her in wonder. "Then you wouldn't like to be married?" she said, as though she were making some incredible statement.

"Oh! I can't—I can't marry!"

The unexpected reply was uttered with the passion of a woman who had plumbed the depths of tragedy. It startled her hearer and puzzled her. Only for a brief moment was the veil drawn aside. The glimpse of a new and unknown woman passed so swiftly as to appear unreal. In quite a different tone the girl and not the woman spoke lightly, almost flippantly.

"Not just yet, Mrs. Oswald. Some day perhaps I may wish for it, and then I suppose it will come."

The older woman was not so easily deceived. She knew that she had looked upon an inner recess, that she had touched depths where passion and longing and emotion lay. It was of the nature of a grave, and her pity was suddenly stirred for what was buried and covered away from the light. For some unknown reason this girl was deliberately trying to put love outside her life, and to

stifle the natural instinct of the heart. It was not right. It was all wrong to harden the heart against marriage and maternity. Miss Madersfield must be very blind if she was encouraging Nonia in such a course.

"Nonia dear, don't you sometimes feel—you, who are so fond of animals, don't you sometimes want—a baby of your own?"

The sound of horses' hoofs diverted Mrs. Oswald's attention. She rose from the tea-table without waiting for Nonia's reply, and went out to meet the arrivals, calling to the butler to bring another pot of tea.

Nonia also sprang to her feet; but she turned her back on her hostess. The small hands clenched tightly, the curved lips quivered, and her head drooped.

"Oh! God! a child!"

Then springing round with a sudden gathering together of her forces, she ran across the room to the corner where she had left Ricki safely shut up in a basket provided by Mrs. Oswald as a temporary shelter. She opened the lid and took out the little soft furry creature, half squirrel, half ferret. Fondling it in her arms, she kissed and cuddled it.

"You little darling! I will make you so happy! much happier than you could ever have been with that horrid Afghan!"

Thus did the stemmed fount find an outlet and starved nature had to be content.

The members of the committee arrived, and after a cup of tea they sat in conclave arranging, after the manner of up-country ball committees in India, for the provision of the supper among themselves, for the decorations by those who could command the largest supply of flowers, and other details usually left in England to the professional caterer and florist.

"Now about the guests. The invitation cards have been issued according to the list we made at our last meeting, and so far I have had very few refusals," said Mrs. Oswald.

"You sent one to Mr. Pensax, I hope," said Maud Honington.

"No, I did not," replied Mrs. Oswald in her decisive final voice.

An awkward silence ensued, and there was a distinct expression of disappointment on the faces of several of the girls. Maud herself flushed and seemed about to remonstrate when Mrs. Oswald went on to give her reasons once more.

"He has not called anywhere except on Mrs. Honington. We don't know who he is or anything about him——"

"Who is that, Mrs. Oswald? Dick Pensax?" asked Nonia.

"Yes, Miss Honington wishes him to be invited to the ball. It was mooted at our last meeting; but vetoed, as we none of us knew him——"

"I know him and can tell you all about him," said Nonia, with some eagerness.

Maud's face lost its sullen expression at the words, her lips parted as though she would speak, and her eyes rested on Nonia with keen anticipation. Pansy Cotheridge it was who asked the question.

"Do tell us who he is and all about him. Is he eligible to be our guest?"

"Most certainly! He is Colonel Tredmere's nephew, the son of a Major Pensax who married Colonel Tredmere's sister. He failed for the army, and went out to Africa. Something to do with mines, I think. He lost his father early, and was brought up abroad, where he learned a good

deal about mining. I believe he passed some examination. Anyway, he has been sent out to India by a syndicate of company promoters to prospect for gold and for radium; so my guardian, Colonel Tredmere, tells me in his letters. Dick hasn't called round because probably he can't find the time. He hasn't even been to see me."

"That puts the matter in an entirely new light," said Mrs. Oswald. "Of course he must be invited, seeing that he is your cousin. I wonder that you did not send us his name, Nonia."

"Like yourself, I was under the impression that he would not wish to come since he had not been able to call," said Nonia.

"Miss Honington can answer for him that he does wish it. I will send the invitation this evening by a syce. I am very glad the explanation has come in time, Miss Honington," she concluded, turning to Maud, who was looking very happy once more.

As the meeting was breaking up and the members going their various ways, Maud sought out Nonia.

"I'm so glad you were able to speak up for the respectability of Mr. Pensax. He has called on us and on no one else. I like him so much."

She spoke awkwardly and with some hesitation, and Nonia glanced at her sharply.

"Don't let yourself go, Maud. Dick is not a marrying man. To begin with, he hasn't the means to keep a wife, and—and—there are other reasons. How are you getting on with your dress?" she asked quickly to turn the conversation from a difficult subject.

"It's finished and looks very well," replied Maud.

"You asked me to lend you my necklace. I haven't forgotten. You may as well take it now. It will save you the trouble of coming over to Chamra House for it."

"Have you got the diamonds with you here?" asked Maud, in some astonishment.

"Yes, I'm wearing them. Some time ago Aunt Mary made a fuss about being left alone with them in the house when I was out for the day. I took to wearing them whenever I had to leave her for any length of time," she explained as she began to unfasten the collar of her blouse. "Here they are!" and she pulled out a fine necklace with a pendant attached.

Mrs. Oswald coming into the room at that moment after speeding her parting guests caught sight of the stones.

"My dear Nonia! Do you usually go about with diamonds round your neck? Surely it's rather rash!"

"It's much safer to wear them hidden under the frock than in full view on one's bare neck!" replied Nonia, with the happy little laugh that was always music in Warborough's ears. "Lock them up, Maud, when you get home, or, if you can't trust your servants, wear them night and day, as I do, under your dress. The clasp may be trusted."

"They are beautiful!" replied Maud, holding the stones in her hand so that they caught the light of the setting sun.

Nonia clasped the necklace round her neck for her, and tucked it out of sight. A little later she and Mrs. Oswald were driving down the racecourse hill towards Coonoor in the smart two-wheeled trap that Colonel Oswald preferred to a motor such as Berringham drove.

* * * * *

"A surprise! a surprise!" said Pansy, as she came into her mother's drawing-room after the meeting.

"What do you think, Mumsie!" cried Ivy. "That good-looking Mr. Pensax is going to be invited to the ball after all!"

"Then I suppose some one has explained satisfactorily who and what he is," replied Mrs. Cotheridge placidly. She never allowed herself to be in any way disturbed by her daughters' discoveries, enthusiasms, or panics. "Well? who was sponser for him?"

"Nonia Armscote of all people!" answered Pansy.

"Oh! Mumsie! It was fun to see Mrs. Oswald," said Ivy, "when Maud brought the subject up again. She put on her proud look and high bust, you know what I mean, and repeated the same old cast-iron objections. Then suddenly Nonia spoke up and told us all about Dick Pensax, as she called him."

Ivy told the tale, and Mrs. Cotheridge listened with a curiosity that was perfectly natural.

"You should have seen Mrs. Oswald fixing Nonia with her truth-finders!" Ivy dropped her voice to a strictly confidential tone which was well known to her mother and sister, and always made the former smile. "Quite between ourselves—you mustn't let it go any further—I don't think Mrs. Oswald quite approves of Nonia Armscote."

"I'm not surprised," responded Mrs. Cotheridge. "There is something about Miss Armscote that makes her unlike other girls. Whether it is her manner or her position I am not prepared to say. She has the independence of a married woman without the status."

"That's only because she happens to be her own mistress," said Pansy, with a shrewd insight to character.

"Mumsie dear! you must really pull yourself together!" said Ivy, putting on an expression of serious concern. "Of course we know that you must sympathize and agree with father even when he's preposterous. You can't help yourself, you've simply got to, or else he would divorce you. At the same time it is obviously your duty to be up to date for our sakes, and think with us. From

our point of view Nonia is not in the least like a married woman. She is her own mistress, and hasn't got to pay for the luxury by being obliged to fuss over some mere man from a ridiculous sense of duty. She has money without having to ask for it; and when she wants to do anything she can simply do it without having to consider any one's convenience but her own. She must be frightfully happy."

Mrs. Cotheridge only laughed—her usual reply to Ivy's sallies.

"If the truth is to be told," said Pansy. "I think Nonia is very lonely with nothing to love but her aunt and those beasts. I don't mind saying that I would rather be married."

"How can she be lonely?" asked Ivy, incredulously. "She has heaps of admirers, just tons of them! Mother! what do you think? Major Berringham drove her and Mrs. Oswald and Captain Devon to Ooty this morning, and they went up Dodabetta. I wish Major Berringham would take me up Dodabetta."

"Anyway, he has asked us to lunch on the first day of the races," said Pansy.

"That's a regimental affair. Why, they have asked mother and Mrs. Honington and Mrs. Stevens and a lot more stuffy old ladies!"

"They've also asked a lot of the men from the hotels," retorted Pansy, who was nothing if she was not just. "So your sweetness, my dear, won't be wasted on desert air or stuffy old ladies."

Ivy ignored the remark, and gazing at her mother with large appealing eyes, said—

"Should you mind very much, Mumsie dear, if I fell in love with Captain Devon? You won't give away my secret, will you? He is so very good-looking."

"I thought Mr. Pensax was the latest," said Mrs. Cotheridge.

"He has passed from my thoughts like a beautiful dream, and I am once more fancy-free!" said Ivy, melodramatically. "Mumsie dear, I can't think how you can exist without falling in love. You are young enough in spirit to do it, and old enough for it not to matter in the least to anybody. It might be such a help to us. Why not fall in love with Major Berringham, for instance? then there would be some hope of his marrying Pansy. It's time Pansy was settled. We shall neither of us have a fortune like Nonia to raise us to a pinnacle of super-independence. The most we can hope for is marriage. Pansy being the elder——"

"Oh! Ivy! do stop. Nonsense runs out of you like rain out of the clouds," cried her elder sister.

"I am glad you have given up all thoughts of Mr. Pensax," said Mrs. Cotheridge. "He may be Colonel Tredmere's nephew, and a most respectable person, but he is not in any of the services. I heard in the club to-day that he bets, and that he is making a book on the races."

"Everybody is doing it, as the play says," remarked Pansy. "Maud told me to-day that she had five different bets on with Mr. Pensax, and she asked me if I wouldn't like to put something on to a horse, any horse I liked."

"You said no, of course," Mrs. Cotheridge remarked.

"I said I would think it over—the modern way of saying no. People don't close the door and lock it behind them nowadays," said Pansy.

"As for me, I told Maud that I should simply love to have a bet if I could be certain about it. Eight annas to a thousand rupees, me on the eight anna side of course. Think, Mumsie dear, what we could do with a whole thousand rupees; wouldn't I treat you to something nice!

We would go on the bust and paint the town pink or any other colour the Mumsie might choose!"

"Ivy! I really don't know where you pick up such slang!" cried Mrs. Cotheridge.

"It's not from you, dear thing! so you have nothing to reproach yourself with. It grows on me like the moss on the rocks, and it's no use your trying to scrape it off. You've got to put up with me as you've put up with dad for the last twenty-five years. Do you know, Mumsie darling, when I come to think of it, you are the greatest saint and the noblest woman I've ever met. I mean to put that on your tombstone when you die, dear."

"Who told you Mr. Pensax was betting?" asked Pansy.

Mrs. Cotheridge did not answer the question. She rose from her chair, saying—

"Now then, girls, be off to your rooms to dress. We dine out to-night, and I've ordered the carriage at half-past seven."

CHAPTER XII

A DAY or two after the expedition to Dodabetta Dick Pensax rode up to Chamra House. He was preoccupied, and allowed his horse to take the hill much as it chose. The question that recurred to his mind frequently was how would Nonia receive him ?

He learned from the butler that Miss Armscote was at home, and he followed the servant into the drawing-room fully expecting from his manner to meet her there ; but he was disappointed.

The air of the room was scented with orange blossom. Nonia had gathered large sprays bearing green fruit, full-blown blossom and wax-like buds on the same stems, and had arranged them in a Japanese jar that stood in one of the long French windows on a carved ebony tripod. The warm afternoon air blowing upon the flowers through the open window had brought out their odour ; and the scent struck him with a force that seemed almost physical in its nature. For a few seconds he was confused with a rush of memories that took him unawares, and when Miss Madersfield came forward to meet him with the conventional welcome, he had no response ready. He recovered himself quickly whilst she spoke.

" It is very good of you to call, Mr. Pensax," she said, in even sleepy tones, like a bee disturbed in its nap among its favourite blossoms. " We have heard from your uncle

what a busy life you are leading. I hope you have been successful in your prospecting."

She shook hands with him, and with her eyes directed him to a chair. Then she dropped back into her own seat, a comfortable lounge, with a little sigh of satisfaction. He vaguely wondered if she were going to close her eyes again and pick up the thread of her dreams which his entrance had rudely broken.

His glance wandered round the room quick and observant. The scent of the orange blossom still kept him busy with memories that had long ago died, as he thought. Other things besides the spoil from the orange trees unbarred doors that he had imagined were closed for ever. He recognized an engraving here, and a piece of china or glass there, that he had seen before. Moreover, the arrangement of the room suggested Nonia. It was her taste and not Miss Madersfield's that made the atmosphere.

The furniture was mostly of Indian carved wood. The chief ornaments were vases of delicate porcelain from the further East with a few bowls of cut glass. Numerous as the vases were every one was bearing its burden of bloom. Tall gladiolus, spikes of penstemon, large sheaves of spotted canna, sprays of plumbago and roses of every shade met his eye in all directions. He remembered the lilac, pink thorns, laburnums and guelder rose in his uncle's house in England, and later the summer flowers; always in profusion; always extravagantly fresh and luxuriously choice and luxuriantly grouped, placed there by Nonia.

On the polished wooden floor were cashmere rugs richly embroidered, and the skins of bears and tigers. Soft curtains of oriental silk hung in the windows, looped back with strings of fine crude turquoise. A few books and magazines lay about on small tables near the fireplace;

but otherwise there was nothing in the modern European style to jar with the tone of the room.

Through the open French windows he saw the deserted tea-table in the trellised corner of the verandah, where the purple passion flower veiled the glare of the afternoon sun with its dark trails of sombre foliage. The table was standing just as Miss Madersfield and Nonia had left it, and a brown hornet bee hummed over the sugar-basin. Here again memory was stirred, for the empty slop-basin stood upon the ground. Some favoured pet had had the remains of the milk, and he would have wagered that the jug was as empty as the basin.

Something that was soothing and restful crept over him as he sat there, scarcely conscious of the presence of his companion in the sudden rush of unbidden thoughts and visions of the past. He pulled himself together and struggled out of the maze into the present.

"I'm sorry I have been so long in calling," he said at last.

"No need to apologize. We have quite understood the reason of your absence. Your uncle always writes so fully——"

He gave her a sharp glance as though he suspected a hidden meaning in her words, but was reassured.

"Where is Nonia?" he asked, breaking into the smooth flowing speech that was like the burbling of a mountain stream.

Miss Madersfield pulled up a cushion behind her head, and settled herself like a soft pussy cat into the lounge.

"Nonia is the most extraordinary girl that ever existed. She cannot sit still for a minute. As soon as a meal is ended she is up and off. She seems to live for nothing but a collection of animals picked up haphazard because some misfortune has chanced to overtake them."

"As fond of furry beasts as ever!" he said, his eyes softening at some recollection. "I remember of old one had only to be sick or hurt, whether animal or human, and all her pity——" he paused, but did not add the other word that rose to his lips—"was roused. The happy creature——" he laughed softly as though the memory was pleasant; "—or shall I say the lucky fellow became the chief object of her attention. I suppose it is still so."

"She doesn't limit herself to fur by any means," replied Miss Madersfield, a touch of indignation disturbing the calm flow of her running remarks. "Scales! feathers! bristles! they're all the same to her, and she is regardless of my feelings on the subject."

"Is she in the garden?"

"If the happy family has a rival of which it may be jealous, it is the flower garden. She loves her flowers. They're not mine; I have none that I can call my own; and I may say that I am quite content to be without a garden, where you have to employ half-naked black men to look after it. There is a beautiful Marshal Neil growing about my bedroom window. As a great concession Nonia says that I may call it mine, if I will allow her to cut the blossoms for this room. Of course she may cut it as she likes, and the horrid gardener may nail it up—when I am not in my room. I draw the line——"

"May I go out and look for her?"

"Looking for Nonia is about as irritating and vexatious as looking for a mongoose or Teddy bear that has got loose. Where you least expect to find——"

She stopped, for she was alone. Pensax knew her of old, and the difficulty of getting a direct answer from her—unless she chose to give it. He was off to search the garden and grounds; or if need be to wait under some shady tree, of which there were plenty to choose from, until she

should appear. Miss Madersfield glanced after his well-built figure with apprehensive admiration. That he was attractive after the manner that commended itself to most women there was no denying; and her mind was in consequence full of misgivings.

"I wish she had taken Colonel Tredmere's advice. He must have had reason for giving it. It will not be for Nonia's good that Dick Pensax should cross her path again, even though she may think herself so safe in her strength."

Meanwhile Pensax wandered across the lawn and stood on the edge of the steep grassy slope where the terraced turf ended. Below was another terrace of lawn bordered with a fence of fuchsia, plumbago, heliotrope and tea roses. Lower still the blue-green foliage of the mimosa with its pale sulphur blossom swept downwards, hiding the strips of vegetable garden. Beyond the mimosa hedge was the broad expanse of richly wooded hill and valley that embowered Coonoor. In the further distance rose the Hoolicul Droog steeped in azure blue and purpling under the descending sun, its outline unbroken by cloud as it stood lonely and mysterious against the western sky.

"'Peace and happiness, rest and quietness.' Where have I heard that term? It seems to express the very essence of this place," mused Dick. "I'm pretty sick of the strenuous life I'm leading. Too much excitement in it." He laughed boyishly. "It would be a blessed change if Nonia——" He checked himself. "No; not here. I should have to take her away if I wanted peace and quietness. Query: would she come?"

He whistled softly the refrain of one of the songs he sang; and like Warborough, who had lingered in the garden only a few days previously, allowed his thoughts to build an airy structure of possibilities.

The green and black butterflies fluttered down towards

the mimosa blossom, and vagrant bees boomed in the heliotrope. The little honey-suckers carelessly pierced the fresh fuchsia bells so munificently provided by nature; and the pied robin preening his black and white plumage piped snatches of his favourite song to his mate.

"Dick!"

He swung round at the sound of her voice.

"Nonia! the fairest flower of——"

"So you've turned up at last! You've taken a very long time to think about it!" she said, a note of hardness in her voice in spite of the smile on her lips and sparkle in her eye. It quenched the half-formed compliment on the spot, and established their relations at once. She meant to be friendly, just that and no more.

He gazed at her unabashed, notwithstanding. "I am glad that you care sufficiently to think the time long. If I could have been sure of my welcome perhaps I might have called sooner."

"Don't be too sure of it even now," she retorted.

He looked her up and down with eyes that seemed as though they could not satisfy their owner. A flash of resentment at the close examination warned him that he must control himself. He half turned aside and said flippantly—

"You—you've grown, Nonia."

"'Wuff! wuff!' as Teddy bear says, when I tell him the same news," she replied off-hand and ever so slightly on the defensive.

"I don't mean taller." He paused, and again let his eyes travel over face and figure. "You're better looking than you were."

"Wuff! wuff! wuff!" This time the voice had an echo of impatience in it which he disregarded.

"I don't wonder that the men——"

"Wuff! again, Dick Pensax! If that's all you came to tell me, you can go back to your prospecting, and you need not call again." Then, seeing a look of genuine consternation and regret on his face, she added less severely, "You're the same old Dick, and I don't see any change in you."

"Mayn't I say what I think?" he asked in a different tone.

"You know that I never liked personalities nor compliments."

"Don't be so hard on me, Nonia. You must be merciful and forgive a poor fellow for being outspoken to a fault." There was silence, and he gathered fresh courage to tread on the forbidden ground of personalities. "It is nice to see you again." The warm light crept into his eyes as he spoke. "It is nice to find you unchanged."

"How do you know that I am unchanged?" she asked, her eyes meeting his with a challenge under which the softer emotion faded.

"Still on the defensive? still distrustful? Do you never forgive? Do you never forget?"

The sadness in his voice touched her and she softened. "That depends!" she replied.

During their conversation her eyes were as busy as his. If, as he had said, she had grown better looking, the compliment might be returned. There was a vast improvement in his appearance since last she had seen him; but this fact she kept to herself. When he returned from Africa he bore the trace of fever and a life of privation. She remembered how sorry she was for him in his weakness and suffering. All her pity was roused, and she felt as though nothing could make up to him for all that he had endured. It was the same emotion so quickly roused by the sight of any creature that was sick or wounded; it

was the feeling that lay at the foundation of her happy family.

The lines had vanished from his face; his figure had filled out, and the drooping head was lifted with all the pride and strength of strong young manhood. He looked a different being from the smitten Dick Pensax of two or three years ago when she had last seen him.

He felt instinctively that he was being judged as he met her gaze. He was also realizing the fact that if he wished to win his way back into her esteem he must be careful not to offend. Nor must he take anything for granted. To be too sure of his ground, and to let her see it, would be even more fatal than weak retreat from the field. He pulled himself up and said, in a different tone altogether from any that he had hitherto used—

"If it depends on me, be assured that I shall not offend. It is the trouble of my life to feel that I was once so unlucky as to"—he halted in his speech as though it pained him beyond everything to speak of it—"as to do you an injury. God knows it was not my fault."

He added the last sentence with a sudden passion that forced the words from his lips in spite of a resolution to be silent on a subject that was forbidden.

She turned from him with a movement that might have been the result of displeasure; or it might have indicated a distrust of herself quite as much as of him.

"Won't you have some tea?" she said, in an entirely different tone, the tone of a hostess mindful of her duties to an ordinary visitor.

"No, thanks; you and Miss Madersfield have had yours, of course——"

"That's no reason why more should not be made for you. Let me call the butler."

She was moving towards the house when he took her

by the wrist and restrained her. She stopped instantly. His hand slipped a little further over the back of hers, and she felt her fingers gathered closely in a warm grip. The unexpected touch, gentle yet firm and possessive, stirred the depths of her being and she was conscious of a slight involuntary shudder, not of fear but of an emotion that she resented.

"Nonia! you are trembling!" he spoke authoritatively but with gentleness. "There is nothing to fear. Take courage and face the music. There! that's better! Now come and sit down and have a chat, although I may as well tell you at once that I've nothing particular to say," he continued watching her face and reading dissent to his proposal. He feared a sudden breaking away, which would not have suited his purpose. "I want to enjoy the luxury of talking to some one I know intimately instead of having to manufacture conversation for strangers who are full of silly curiosity."

He led her towards a seat at the end of the lawn under a large silver oak. It was in full view of the drawing-room windows. This end of the lawn could also be seen from the gate. Miss Madersfield still sat where Pensax had left her so unceremoniously. All desire to sleep had forsaken her, and she was using her knitting-needles in desultory fashion. A novel was lying on the table by her side; but she was too much occupied with the figures on the lawn to be able either to read or knit.

"At his old tricks again! Dear me! dear me! I wish we had gone home!" she murmured to herself as she observed the two walking apparently hand-in-hand.

She was not the only person to observe the incident. Warborough arriving at the gate with the intention of paying a call noted their attitude; he suddenly changed his mind about going in and passed on up the road. All unaware

of what other eyes had seen, Nonia permitted herself to be led to the seat, where she sat down, first freeing her hand from Dick's.

"That's right, Nonia; now let your mind be at rest about by-gones—for the present. I want to tell you, dear," the expression seemed to slip out unconsciously, "what I am doing; and then I want to hear all that you are doing; how you like your life up here, and what kind of a happy family has the supreme satisfaction of living under your protection. Aunt Mary is very funny on the subject, as she always was. She says you have adopted furs, feathers, scales, and bristles, and that you draw the line at nothing—except a husband!"

"I am sure Aunt Mary did not mention the word 'husband'!"

"Quite right! I added that off my own bat."

By this time she was at ease. Fear, indefinite and shadowy, had faded away and confidence was established. As he talked on without further reference to the past, content to accept the position she had assigned to him, her natural gaiety asserted itself. She was beguiled into fun and laughter, and before long the two were on the best of terms.

He made no further attempt to take her hand or express by word or look that he felt anything more than the good comradeship that might exist between two old friends. He steered scrupulously clear of compliment or personal remark; he even refrained from asking any question that might be thought inquisitive. In short, Nonia found him charming; and the minutes slipped by unheeded until nearly an hour was gone. Miss Madersfield counter-ordered her rickshaw and gave up her intended run down to the club. Her ears caught the sound of Nonia's laughter, which filled her with misgivings.

The sun descended upon the hills. It was a calm, beautiful evening. Teneriffe and Dodabetta held their heads clear and distinct in outline against an undimmed sky. The thunder-clouds had vanished for the present.

Suddenly Nonia sprang to her feet. "Dick! you must see my happy family before it gets dark. Come along, quick! We shall just be in time for the feeding of the lions."

She led the way up to the terrace behind the bungalow. Houssain was busy helping Adbul; and the preparations were conducted with a leisurely deliberation that was very trying to the hungry expectant beasts.

The old sepoy glanced at Pensax with swift scrutiny, and then dropped his eyes upon Teddy, as the bear began a kind of war dance of impatience at the sight of the sweetened rice, so close and yet out of reach. Pishasha, the monkey, who took his food later in the back verandah, watched his opportunity, and whilst his master's attention was momentarily diverted by the advent of the stranger, dipped his hand into Teddy's rice and stole a handful. If the bear had been loose there would have been a riot. As it was there was only a row—a noisy protest, a rattling of the chain on the part of the indignant Teddy, and a guttural chortle from the thief.

Houssain was prompt to set matters straight. He caught Pishasha by the arm; and with a dexterous and ruthless finger turned out the contents of the monkey's cheek. With a cuff he ordered Pishasha off to the back verandah; and very unwillingly he went, snarling at Pensax in passing.

"Not at all a pleasant pet, that monkey of yours, Nonia. I thought for a moment that he meant to vent his rage and disappointment on me and bite my leg. He looked vicious enough."

"He isn't mine; he belongs to Houssain."

"Who is Houssain?" asked Pensax.

"The old sepoy, over there by Teddy bear. He was in Colonel Tredmere's regiment. Now he is my body-guard and henchman. When I walk beyond the grounds he follows, never letting me out of his sight. When I ride, however, he is obliged, much against the grain, to leave me to the syce."

"Your chucker-out, in short!" said Pensax, looking at the old man. "There is nothing to fear up here. You're safer here than in the streets of London."

"Of course; but Houssain likes to feel that he is necessary, and I never hurt his feelings by showing him that I think his escort is not required. He is obeying the order of a superior officer, which in his eyes is a most sacred duty."

The sun had gone behind the hills, and the afterglow, with its extraordinary brilliancy, flooded the landscape. The marvellous colouring lasted barely ten minutes. Then the pulsing vitality of earth and sky seemed struck all in a moment by the finger of death. The colour faded and the grey-green pallor of the Indian twilight crept over the sky and deadened the mountains. The gold dust scattered broadcast by the sun turned to steel. The rocks blackened and the forest veiled itself in dark shadows that swallowed up the individual trees and clothed them in a sombre uniform green.

Nonia's attention had been fully occupied in watching her happy family in the enjoyment of the evening meal. Dick was well content to let his eyes rest on her as she moved about among her pets. Suddenly she realized that night was not far off.

"Will you come in and have a chat with Aunt Mary? I am sure you would enjoy it," she added, slily remembering

of old how he used to avoid that worthy but tiresome lady.

Pensax shook off the crowd of thoughts he had allowed to gather and laughed.

"Thank you; that's a pleasure to be deferred to another day. Aunt Mary will keep. I must be getting back to the hotel, as I have some letters to write for to-morrow's English mail. May I have my horse?"

Houssain, who lingered to see that Abdul put away the pots and pans, was told to call the syce.

"I'm glad you came, Dick," she said presently, as they walked towards the gravel sweep in front of the porch.

"I don't think Miss Madersfield would echo your sentiments. Thank you, dear, for your kindness."

He expressed his gratitude so naturally that she could not take offence at the words. Something in his tone touched her ready sympathy, and she said with friendly warmth—

"You will come again, won't you?"

"I am hard at work all day long. It is difficult to get an afternoon like this."

"Your evenings are not filled up?"

"No; they are free as a rule."

"Come to dinner, then."

"May I?" he responded with eagerness.

"Yes; if you will promise to be as nice as you have been to-day."

"I promise! Dear one! I will do anything, everything you wish!" For once he was off his guard, and the words slipped out in spite of his effort to obey her wish. For a moment she caught a glimpse of his soul. Then the doors closed and the self-possessed man continued in a voice that was skilfully schooled into pure friendliness and nothing more. "Nonia, you must trust me. For the

last two years I have been learning a hard lesson. I may be excused if regret catches me now and then by the throat when I am off my guard."

Again her pity was roused and she felt nothing but warm sympathy for one who had suffered. She forgot her own wrongs and the misery he had at one time brought into her life, unintentionally, as he had truly said.

"Is it wise to renew our old friendship, Dick?" she asked, searching his eyes vainly for the truth which she could not trust his tongue altogether to speak.

"I was never a coward, was I, dear? Look here! If you say I'm to keep away for your sake, I'll keep away."

He gazed at her intently in the dim twilight as though he were seeking for something in her eyes which was not there.

"You need not consider me, Dick. I am pleased to see you if you like to come. On the other hand, I tell you plainly that I shall not grieve if you stay away."

There was a slight pause as they stood face to face.

"Indifferent—after all that has passed between us?"

"Absolutely!" was the reply given without hesitation.

Again there was a pause. Then he said, in a low, tense voice, the words seeming to come from between his teeth—

"Then, if I need only consider my own feelings, I shall come as often as I can." There was a pause. He broke it by asking, "When may I come?"

"To-morrow evening if you like," was the ready reply.

The syce was leading up the horse, followed by Houssain. Their arrival put an end to the conversation. Dick's foot was in the stirrup and he swung himself into the saddle. At that moment a cry rang out in the far distance high up

in the mountain. It was the same cry that had been heard when Warborough was with Nonia, but it did not come from the same direction. On that evening it was in the shola behind the house. To-night it sounded further away up the Kotagiri road.

"It's the hyæna!" exclaimed Nonia. "There, Houssain! you've heard it at last. There! there it is again!"

Pensax glanced at the old pensioner, who stood erect and motionless, his eyes turned towards the mountain.

"Is it a hyæna?" asked Dick, carelessly; he was not sportsman enough to have his blood stirred by the sound of big game.

"Yes! yes! isn't it, Houssain? You've seen the tracks and you ought to know," said Nonia, with more excitement than Pensax had shown.

The old man did not reply. He was straining his ears to catch it yet again, if it should be repeated once more. Abdul, slipping through the branches of the mimosa, came silently to the sepoy's side.

"Father! you heard it! Is it the cry of a beast or a devil?" he asked in a voice that trembled with real fear.

"A devil, my son, and a wicked one."

The syce, looking at Houssain, muttered an assent as he opened the gate, adding, in his own tongue—

"A devil, a white pishasha of the most evil kind!"

"Good-bye, Nonia, I shall see you again soon," cried Pensax as he rode out into the highway.

He turned his horse's head up the valley and, touching him with his spurs, galloped off into the darkening shadows.

As she retraced her steps to the house she said to herself, "How odd of Dick! He said he wanted to get back to

the hotel to write letters; and he has ridden up the road instead. He can't have gone to look for the hyæna. Now, if it had been Captain Warborough—— "

The soft light in her eyes as she entered the bungalow was not due to the memory of Dick's visit. Already he had passed out of her mind; or if she thought of him at all it was merely to say to herself, " Poor Dick! I'm afraid he is not very happy."

CHAPTER XIII

Warborough started out that afternoon with the full intention of calling at Chamra House after he had been to see Berringham. He found the latter quite recovered from the slight accident on Dodabetta. A polite note from Miss Madersfield, asking after his health and expressing much concern that he had hurt himself, assisted Berringham's recovery. There was no message from Nonia; the letter was apparently written without her instigation, and Berringham was just a little dismayed at finding himself the object of the elder lady's solicitation. He wrote a very curt reply, saying that he was perfectly well.

From Berringham's quarters Warborough rode on to the Castle and had a talk with the Colonel; and at Mrs. Oswald's invitation he stayed to tea. Maud Honington and two or three other girls were there. The conversation was mostly of a personal or social nature; the coming races and other meetings; tennis parties, cricket, golf, and prospective dances. Warborough seemed to be taking part in the conversation; but it was mostly as a listener. As usual he was silent; and Mrs. Oswald, glancing into his face now and then, came to the conclusion that he had nothing to say, and was a man of few ideas beyond his own line of occupation.

Captain Devon dropped in just as they had finished tea. He was at once attacked on the subject of his dress for the ball.

"What are you going as, Miss Honington?" he asked of Maud.

"Queen of Diamonds."

"Then I shall go as the Knave of Hearts," he replied, a challenge in his eyes.

"The character is bespoken already, and we don't want two knaves; the King of Diamonds is not appropriated as far as I know."

"It doesn't appeal to me," replied Devon. "Who is my supplanter?"

"Mr. Pensax; the dress will suit him exactly," said Maud.

"His figure or his character?" asked Devon, laughing.

"Both, if you like."

"We don't know much about him," said Mrs. Oswald; "but we can judge of one thing, and that is, that the dress will suit his figure."

"We know all about him now," objected Maud. "There is no mystery about him whatever."

"Who is my rival?" said Devon, boldly. "I should like to know his history before I slay him."

Maud laughed and shot a glance at him. "He is Colonel Tredmere's nephew, and known to Miss Armscote. She can tell you all about him. You will have to think of something else, Captain Devon."

"I have thought," he answered with an expression of suddenly assumed melancholy that raised a laugh all round.

"What is it? do tell us."

"The melancholy Jaques, that Johnnie in Shakespear, you know. How do you think I ought to dress for it?"

In the babel of the many voices that tendered advice, Warborough took leave of his hostess and rode away. At the turning by the Coonoor entrance of Sim's Park he bore

to the left and cantered up the road towards Chamra House.

He had not yet fulfilled his promise of showing Nonia his photographs and sketch-maps. He had added to them during the last few days, and he felt sure that she would be interested.

When he reached the gate he pulled up and looked in. He caught sight of the two figures sauntering across the end of the lawn. His eyes were good and were not likely to deceive him. He recognized Pensax and Nonia, and knew that he made no mistake. He distinctly saw that Pensax held her hand as they walked; and she apparently was content that it should rest in his. Of course she was at liberty to grant a privilege of the kind to any man she chose; and it was not for him to object. Yet the sight somehow upset him in a very unusual manner.

What did it mean? Pensax had mentioned that he was acquainted with the occupants of Chamra House; but the fact had been communicated in such a way as to leave the impression that they were old acquaintances rather than old friends. That very afternoon he had heard incidentally how they came to be acquainted. Of course they might be cousins. Judging, however, by what he had just seen, there was something more than mere friendship or cousinship between the two, who were too much absorbed in each other to note the passer-by.

He shook the reins with an impatient movement, and the horse continued its way up the hill. Warborough had the valley to himself. There were no idlers from Wellington loafing over the hills from the direction of the barracks; and he met no hill men. His thoughts were not with the things of the road. They were centred on the vision he had just had. Somehow he was unable to forget it. It had knocked at the door of his inner self and had

brought him abruptly face to face with a fact that he had tried to ignore.

Was he or was he not in love with Nonia? This was the question he was asking himself with frank directness. If he was in love, then he had been guilty of folly in letting himself go before he had made sure of his ground. If he was not in love with the girl, then what did it matter if Pensax, or Berringham, or any other man held her hand by the hour together.

He was vaguely irritated at the turmoil created within his mind. Like many other men of the present day, he prided himself on being self-controlled. It was weak—not to call it by a severer name—to show emotion. It was weak to allow himself to be ruffled. The expression on his features was more blank than usual, as with an effort he dismissed the incident and focussed his attention on the scenery through which he was passing.

To his left lay the hills above the military station. They were bathed in the golden light of the afternoon. Every bush, every rock stood out as clearly as if a magic searchlight had been turned upon the landscape. The great white Madonna lilies just coming into bloom looked down from inaccessible heights, their roots buried under boulders, their trumpet heads secure from the rifling hand of the flower gatherer in an entrenchment of wild guavas, laurels and hoary brambles.

To his right the hills were more broken. Walls of rock stood grey and brown against the intense blue of the south-eastern sky. Strips of forest covered every ravine and hid the mountain streams in masses of tree fern and creeper.

He recognized the cliff with its sentinel tree on the edge standing out against the sky, the limit of his walk with Periyar. He searched for the outlet of the path by which he had been led down from the moorland above, but could

not find it. It had seemed plainly defined as he walked along, and he did not understand how it could escape his eyes now in the clear light of day. A check on the rein brought the horse to a standstill; he lifted his glasses and examined the cliff from the base to the top. A voice at his stirrup asked—

"Is your honour looking for any one?"

He glanced down and recognized a head constable whom he knew by sight. A second and a younger man in police uniform approached from the jungle.

"I was looking for the path from the cliff."

"It is there. Your honour could easily find it by passing between that large tree and the piece of rock near it. From there it is plainly marked. Halfway up it divides, one path going towards Coonoor, the other to Kotagiri. It is too steep for the horse, your honour."

"I was not thinking of riding; some other day I may walk up to the open country. Are there any Toda buffaloes to be seen in that direction?"

"Sometimes; but they are more likely to be found on the other side of Kotagiri."

"How far from here?"

"Eight or ten miles; may be more, sir."

"Is Mr. Lutterworth anywhere in this direction to-day?" he asked.

"No, sir; he had to go down the ghat as far as Burliar this morning. He will not be back at his bungalow till late to-night."

Warborough rode on, and the two constables looked after him.

"That officer gentleman is taking long leave on the hills. He has no wife and no family."

"How does he pass the time?" asked the older man. "In polo? or cricket? or big game shooting?"

"He goes picture-catching," replied the constable. "His servant told me that he has a devil inside the box that catches the pictures, and the devil can make them move as if they were alive."

"Chut! that is no devil! Next time you have leave, go down to Madras and see the moving pictures there. It is done by a bright twinkling light and the turning of wheels. The wheels can be heard in the darkened room as one sits and looks at the pictures on the white sheet."

The younger man was true to his generation in receiving the statement of the elder man with scepticism.

"The English are queer people. They speak of wheels and machinery where we should speak of devils. They say that it is a wheel that sends the carriage along without a horse; a wheel that sends messages flying without messengers; and a wheel that makes living men and women and horses walk on the lighted-up curtain."

"It is so, my son," replied the other with conviction.

"My mother says that there is different talk in the bazaar."

The head constable seated himself on the top of the low stone wall that protected the road from the ravine on the left. He drew up his feet and squatted on his heels, his face towards the cliff. In appearance he was like a large turbaned vulture roosting after a heavy meal; but in one respect he differed. He was wide awake and his eyes were constantly scouring the hillsides.

"What is it if it is not a wheel?" he asked of the younger man, a note of contempt in his voice.

"All the wonderful things that they do are done with the help of devils that they bring with them in bottles from England. They do not speak about them because it would rouse the jealousy of our own devils, and there would be fighting; and it is well known that countries are

destroyed when the evil ones fight. Our pishashas are not so clever as the devils of the English. They can only throw stones and set fire to houses and bring sickness or madness to those who offend them. They can't catch pictures and make them move ; or shut up talk and singing and laughter into trumpets to be uncorked and let out like smoke at will. They can't set carriages running without horses or fire or smoke. They have no knowledge how to make little glass tubes swim in milk to which the milkman has added water ; nor can they separate the lightning from the thunder and put it into a glass ball to give light. All that I have mentioned is the work of the European devil, and it is beyond the power of the Indian devil."

He ran on in lazy deliberate speech with many "er—ers" in between his words ; and he spoke in the loud unmodified voice of a man accustomed to a life in the open air. The other listened patiently, occasionally ejaculating a monotonous "umph" to indicate that he had heard.

"The butler at the Glenview Hotel is from Madras," said the head constable. "He is a Christian, of the same religion as the English who do these things. He says that there are no devils except one ; and he is big and ugly with a house to himself called 'Ee'yell.' He troubles himself not with tricks, but walks about, roaring like a lion and catching men and eating them. The Great God of the Christians has given him permission to catch and eat all the wicked."

"In that case he will never suffer from famine," remarked the younger, simply stating what he believed to be a fact, and innocent of any attempt to be witty or smart. "But I do not believe that Christian talk. There are Indian devils in our trees and rivers and rocks ; and there are European devils in the bottles of the English.

Father!" it was an honorific term and not one of relationship, "need we remain here after the sun has gone below the hills?"

He had seated himself on the wall close to his companion, and his eyes rolled round from the deep shadows of the valleys to the steep face of the precipice. As soon as the sun disappears from the firmament the devils in India are said to be loosed, and to have power to roam on the earth where they will. The thought disturbed the believer in the powers of evil.

"The order is, my son, that we watch the path and the cliff until it is dark. It will not be long now before the sky will grow grey."

"Shall we go further down the road, honourable father? We can watch the road and the cliff from there, and easily see if any one comes from that direction."

"The order, given by his excellency before he left for Burliar, was, that we were to stay on the road where the path from the cliff joins it. That was the order and here we stay."

The younger constable submitted to fate with the resignation of the fatalist. It was consoling to feel that he was under the wing of a superior, taking no responsibility himself; to pass the time he talked.

"Does my father remember when the railway was being built how a great grey devil in the shape of a monkey turned the trolly off the line and threw it into the stony nullah?"

"It was said that the men were going over-fast, too fast for the turn in the line at that point, and the trolly wheels jumped off the rails."

"That was the story of the English magistrate who made inquiry. Always the work of wheels with the English! We know better! If the four dead men could

have spoken, they would have said the same as the fifth, who came out of hospital six months afterwards. He said that he saw the devil with his own eyes, sitting on the low wall of the bridge, just as we are sitting on this wall. It was grey to whiteness, and it had a long tail that hung down and touched the ground."

"How can I tell whether it was a monkey or a devil? I only speak what his excellency Lutterworth Dorai said."

Encouraged by this admission, the other continued his advocacy of the devil theory.

"The English know everything that belongs to England; but the swamis say that there are many things in India that are hidden from the foreigner. Whether they work their wonders by cunning wheels or powerful devils, they have no control over our Indian spirits. There was a reason for the grey devil to watch by the bridge and overthrow the trolly."

"What was the reason?" asked the head constable, his eye resting curiously on a part of the shola below the cliff. A number of thrushes were chattering vociferously as they chatter in an English shrubbery over the presence of a cat.

"It had been arranged that the chief engineer himself should travel down by that same trolly. At the last minute the big master of the railway altered his plan and the coolies came down alone. There was no time for the news to be carried to the devil who waited; and he threw the trolly over into the nullah, thinking to kill the chief engineer himself."

"Why should he want to kill him?"

"Because he had cut down the tree in which the devil lived and built the railway over the place. Hark! what was that?"

The scream of an owl in the shola accounted for the unrest among the thrushes. The scolding was doubled, and a discomfited owl, half blind with the brilliant light of the afterglow, blundered out of the foliage and fluttered away towards the deeper shadows under the cliff.

"Ah! bah! a devil! my father!" cried the younger man, trembling with fear and sidling closer to his companion.

"That was no devil! It was an owl driven away by the mother birds."

"I am glad that it did not fly towards us. It is not good to meet owls at any time of the day."

They spoke no more, but sat there faithful to the command of their superior officer. Although the head constable professed a certain contempt for tales of local devils, being a man of the plains and not of the hills, the blood of a long line of superstitious ancestors ran in his veins. The owl was an owl, an unlucky omen, but not a devil. The devil might be there as well as the owl. His chief had ordered him to watch and report on every traveller going and coming that way, but he had said nothing about owls and devils; and the head constable felt that either the one or the other would be out of place and unnecessary in his report.

The afterglow faded and the brilliant colouring vanished. Madonna lilies lost their golden gleam and became moon-white blotches against the grey-green foliage of the guava and bramble. The mimosa's fine delicate leaves silvered in the twilight, and the soft yellow blossom was lost in shadow.

The bustling wind of the afternoon had died down, and the twilight came with a silvery stillness, not of sleep, but of the awakening of the night. Eyes that had blinked

in the full glare of noonday, blinded by the gold dust of the sun, opened to their fullest.

As the head constable and his companion continued their watch, a curious and uncomfortable sensation crept over them, a consciousness that undefined eyes were focussed upon them and that they were being silently watched themselves. The hills and valleys, the cliffs and forest trees, even the freckled boulders blotched with grey and orange lichen, were impregnated with a strange immovable vitality, cold, unresponsive, inimical. To the waiting men they said, "Go home; seek the protection of your household fires; this is no place for you when the stronger powers of evil are let loose."

Not only did they recognize the unspoken command, but the birds and butterflies had also heard it and obeyed. Fearful of the mysterious eyes of night these had sought the shelter of the foliage of the forest. Only the owl and the nightjar, the bat and the ghostly moth, had dared to brave that weird vigilance of inanimate nature.

The glance of both men turned frequently to the narrowing belt of crimson and orange sky against which the hills slowly darkened into a deep madder-brown tint. Not until the last ray of glowing colour should fade into cool liquid green might they stir from their post.

Again an owl shrieked, this time behind them in the valley; and they heard the swish of its soft feathers as it flapped along in an even flight towards the hill where the lilies sent forth their sweetness to the night air.

"It is time to go, honoured father," said the constable, persuasively. "What is the good of remaining any longer? It is too dark to see any one by this light. If he were carrying contraband stuff, would he be likely to come near us, seeing our uniform and knowing who we were?"

He stepped down from the wall and stretched himself, careful not to move far from his companion. The shadows on the road were deepening into the blackness of the night; and the forest under the cliff had lost its varied tints and clothed itself in a dark green. The precipice itself had changed from grey to a deep slate colour; and the sentinel tree above stood out against the twilight sky a silhouette in inky black.

Suddenly from somewhere in the face of that beetling rock a voice broke out rending the silence with a terrible cry. It was without articulation, but for all that it was human in its nature and burdened with pain, the hoarse plaintive scream of an agony that was unendurable.

The head constable leaped to his feet. His companion clasped him about the arms, jibbering in a vain attempt to express the fear that had seized his timid soul. He tried to ask what it was, although inwardly he was convinced that it could only emanate from the spirit world.

The cry was the same that had echoed down the valley and startled Nonia and Houssain.

The two men stood linked together, seeking strength and courage from each other, their eyes fixed upon that dark wall that rose above the forest.

Was it fancy, or did they see something move?

A shadowy figure seemed to take form on the face of the rock where there could never be foothold for man. Like a wisp of vapour swayed by the wind it seemed to gather substance. Long thin arms were extended, and a mouldy shroud hung from them in tattered length against the slatey rock. A hooded head was raised, and again that deathlike scream was uttered in a prolonged minor cadence suggesting unspeakable pain and woe.

"The white devil!" gasped the young constable,

shaking as if he had palsy. "Father! he comes to eat us!"

He shrieked in his fear as the figure seemed to float towards them with a slow heavy movement like the flapping of the owl's soft wings. The night bird heard it and was disturbed. Even as the two men turned to run, the owl that had troubled the thrushes came towards them in hasty flight with a scream that echoed the human cry of the constable. The sight of the owl broke the spell that held them. They found the use of their feet and fled in blind fear, terrified and unnerved, their heavy boots beating the road as they ran. Their throats were parched and their eyes saw only the open way. They passed Pensax, who had pulled his horse to the side of the road and sat looking after them with an amused smile. They heard nothing of the sharp trot of hoofs behind them as Warborough rode down the valley. Panting and gasping, they were hailed at the gate of Chamra House by the old sepoy. The young man dropped to the ground at his feet crying—

"Save me! save me from the white devil! We have seen it! It flies after us! it will assuredly eat us!"

"Brother! brother! there is nothing to hurt," said Houssain, soothingly. He turned to the head constable, who was quickly recovering his breath and his self-possession. "Come in and rest and let us know what you have seen and heard."

* * * * *

Warborough pulled up sharply as he distinguished a man on horseback by the side of the road.

"Is that you, Pensax?" he said peering at the rider in the dim light.

"Yes, I say, what was that infernal screeching up

the valley? You must have been close to it. Was it a hyæna?"

There was a slight pause before the answer came.

"Yes; I should say so; but I'm not versed in the ways of hyænas. It might have been a leopard in a trap."

"Did you see anything?"

"Too dark to see an animal at this time of night unless it crossed the road right in front of one's horse."

"Those police fellows were running as if the devil himself was at their heels. I don't think I ever saw men in quite such a funk before." He laughed again at the memory, and as Warborough made no reply he continued, "There'll be a fine tale in the bazaar to-morrow, and Lutterworth will have to be very firm about this beat. Not a man will be seen on the road after sunset if I know the native."

"It might well be left to take care of itself, I should say," remarked Warborough, as he pushed his horse into a trot.

"Lutterworth wouldn't be with you there. He is convinced that the illicit trade in opium and gunja is carried on somewhere between this and Kotagiri; and I think he may be right. I should put a watch, however, much further up the road on the other side of the valley behind those hills above Wellington. The loafing of the men about here is only a blind to mislead the police. However, it's not my business. I've got other things to think of besides smuggled liquor and drugs."

Warborough did not reply, and the other, finding him inclined to be unresponsive, relapsed into silence himself. Just before they reached the hotel Pensax said—

"I wonder if Lutterworth happened to be up in that

direction this evening; you didn't meet him, I suppose?"

"No; I saw nothing of him; I suppose he had business elsewhere."

Warborough, never communicative, did not think it incumbent on him to repeat what the head constable had said about his chief.

CHAPTER XIV

Warborough came in later than usual to dinner that evening; and Pensax was more than halfway through the meal when he took his seat. Finding Warborough preoccupied and disinclined to talk, Pensax rose as soon as he had finished and strolled off to the verandah, where he joined a group of men who were lighting their cigarettes.

The talk among them was about horses with the probabilities and possibilities of the races.

"You've entered some horses, Pensax, haven't you?" asked an artillery officer on leave.

"I've got three in. Two have been in training; but the third is my hack that I'm using up here."

"Who's riding for you?"

"I'm riding myself. It would be no use asking any one to take on the hack. I'm the only man who can get him over the course."

"Jibber?"

"Like the deuce! If he chooses to go, he'll pull off the race to a certainty; but the chances are that he won't choose."

"He looks as if he could go. You were riding him to-day, weren't you?"

"Yes; that's the horse! Nothing wrong with him but his temper. Sometimes he'll start and run like a lamb; at other times he'll stick like the devil, and nothing will move him."

"What do you do? thrash him?"

"Not a bit of good! I light a cigarette. He knows that I prefer to walk when I'm smoking. Out of pure cussedness he'll start off and put on his very best pace as soon as he smells tobacco; and he won't stop till the cigarette has been chucked away."

There was a laugh, and some one asked what name he had given him.

"He's entered as the Dark'un. It's just a toss-up what he'll do."

"Have you seen Berringham's lot?"

They were still discussing horses when Warborough appeared. Pensax addressed some inconsequent remark to him as he came up by way of including him in the conversation if he were inclined to join in, but Warborough did not respond with any warmth. After a few minutes he strolled down the steps of the verandah and along the carriage drive. His thoughts were occupied with that one fleeting glance he had had of Nonia on the lawn with Pensax. Try as he would, he could not shake off the impression it had created. Clearly and distinctly the two figures stood out; he holding her hand and she with her head bent, docile, consenting, happy. Had she not been content would she have permitted any man to assume that attitude towards her?

Somehow the thought of her life placed in the power of a man such as he took Pensax to be, did not please him. Like many others who have entered regular professions, he had an undefined dislike to the rolling stone. It was true Pensax was employed upon some definite work at the present time; but it was of the job kind. When it came to an end it broke off abruptly; and he would be left at a loose end in the ranks of the temporarily unemployed. There was no prospect of promotion with increasing pay

as in his own case. On the contrary, the next billet might not carry as good a salary as the present one. There was neither advancement not permanence in his line of life; and in Warborough's opinion a man so situated had no right to ask a woman to share his lot. It would mean that sometimes she would have all or more than she needed; at others her husband would be at his wits' ends to provide her with the bare necessities of existence.

But Nonia had money, if he might believe all that gossip said. In that case there would be no danger of privation. Then a man should be all the more careful how he tried to link his fate with hers. When his profession failed him, he would be nothing more nor less than a pensioner on her bounty.

Pensax had a happy good-natured temperament that bordered on carelessness; and the conviction forced itself on Warborough that it would come easy to a man of his nature to accept such a situation. It would not trouble him in the least to sit down in Nonia's house and enjoy the benefits of her income. It would not enter his head that by so doing he left less for her to spend over herself; that it might entail self-denial on her part. To give an idle husband his daily bread meant money from some source or other, and if he did not contribute it to the housekeeping she must. To Warborough a dependent position upon any relative, and most of all, upon a wife, would be intolerable. He could not help feeling annoyed with the man to whom it was not intolerable.

He walked out of the gateway with a sudden determination to go and look up Lutterworth. Perhaps a talk with the Assistant Superintendent of Police would give a different turn to his thoughts.

Lutterworth lived in a little bungalow hidden in a bower of trees on the slope below the hotel. Looking down on

its roof from the grounds of the hotel, the wonder was how it managed to keep its position. It seemed as though it must slip over the edge and slide into the deep broad valley out of which sprang Lamb's Rock and other giant cliffs. The air came up from below in warm puffs, and bright-plumaged birds that belonged to a lower elevation paid visits to the sheltered sun-lit garden. Monkeys chattered and squabbled on the rocky cliffs below, and the sound of their cries came up on the soft wind. It suited the police officer to live there when he was not in camp.

Late as it was Lutterworth had not yet risen from the dinner-table. On Warborough's appearance he pushed aside his cheese plate, seized his half-finished tumbler, left the dinner-table and came into the centre room which served as sitting-, smoking-, and writing-room in one.

"Glad to see you, Warborough. Have a cigar. I forgot! You don't smoke. Anyway, I'll have one. Take that chair. Get out of the way, Peter," he said to a large Airedale, that looked as if it had too much food and too little exercise.

Peter moved lazily at the word of command, and his master threw himself into a favourite chair with a sigh.

"Well, I've had a tiring day of it, and no mistake!" he said as he helped himself to a match and lighted his cigar. "However, it's all in the day's work, so I must not grumble. It's what I'm paid for, and I ought to consider myself lucky to be in such a good climate."

"A long day of inspection, I suppose," remarked Warborough.

"I've been halfway down the ghat into that close, muggy atmosphere that takes it out of you. It's an odd thing that when you're coming up the hill you don't feel

it; it actually seems cool at Burliar by contrast with the heat of the plains; but when you're going down from here it's quite another thing."

"The journey is easy enough nowadays, thanks to the railway," remarked Warborough.

"I rode; I wanted to cover the whole length of the cart road and, if possible, keep my eye on the old ghat track as well. The coolies who carry loads on their heads still use the short cuts."

Warborough did not ask any questions. It was not his habit. He waited for Lutterworth. If he chose to mention the object of his journey, well and good; if not he would be content to talk on any other topic. Even station gossip would be good enough to keep down thoughts that refused to be laid when he was alone.

"I went up the valley for a ride," he said as his companion did not speak. "Wonderfully clear and fresh the air is as soon as you get into the hills and out of reach of the warmth that rises from the plains."

"Your object of course was only pleasure, and you could choose your own line. Mine was business connected with this illegal traffic in opium and liquor which we have reason to think is being carried on somewhere not far from Coonoor and Wellington. From information that has reached me, I think the supplies come by bullock-cart and not by rail."

"It is quite likely."

"The worst of it is that drugs of that kind are easily hidden."

"How do they make up opium for transport?" asked Warborough.

"It is kneaded up with palm treacle, and it looks like a lump of dark mud. Usually it is packed in small earthen pots; but if it is smuggled, one may expect to find it

masquerading as jaggery or raggi cake or anything else."

"I thought the cart road was deserted and everything came up by rail now."

"Not at all! Transport by cart is cheaper than rail; and though we haven't nearly as much traffic on the road there is still a regular service. Between this and Burliar I met no less than a dozen carts all loaded with stuff of various kinds. I stopped every one of them and made them turn out their contents. A good deal of it was grain for the Ooty bazaar. There was a large drum of motor oil for Pensax, and a case of machinery, which he requires, I suppose, for his prospecting."

"Why doesn't he get the things up by rail?"

"Economy; it costs much less, so he tells me, to have the oil up that way; and it saves the necessity of transferring from the railway to the carts at this end of the journey. There were two loads of bamboos for building purposes——"

"Who is building up here?"

"Some native at Kotagiri and another at Ooty, according to the invoices. Then there were bales of calico and native cloths."

"No sign of what you were looking for?"

"None whatever. The drivers, too, were satisfactory. Nothing sheepish or self-conscious about their behaviour. If there had been anything queer about them they would have been frightened at the sight of the police; but they chattered together and were completely at ease, lending a hand wherever it was wanted and appearing innocence itself."

"I suppose you opened the bales."

"Every one of them, and had them fastened up again and sealed. The bags of grain as well were examined.

Even the case of machinery was opened. My constables had a hard day's work hauling those heavy goods about, I can tell you!"

"And the bamboos: did you have them unloaded?"

"Every stick; but there was nothing—yes, there was something, by-the-by, which made us all jump. We found a small cobra at the bottom of the cart. It must have been hidden in one of the bundles when the men loaded up at Mettapollium. The constables killed it. It was lucky that no one was bitten."

There was silence, during which Lutterworth puffed clouds of smoke above his head, and Warborough lay back in his chair curiously still.

"And so I came home!" continued the Assistant Superintendent of Police, with a sigh of fatigue. "I shouldn't mind the bother of it all if it led to anything. I left the syce to bring up the horse and I took the evening train. I got in about eight."

Again there was silence; and Lutterworth glanced at Warborough, wondering if he was taking forty winks. His eyes were wide open, however, and they caught the glance. As if in reply he spoke.

"The bamboos were going to Ooty and Kotagiri, you say. They're hollow, aren't they—at least some of them."

Lutterworth sat bolt upright and stared at his companion.

"By George!" was his comment. "By George!" he repeated. "I never thought of that. Excuse me; I must send for the inspector; there's no time to be lost."

He called a police peon and despatched a rapidly written note. Then he returned and resumed his seat.

"Now, I wonder why it didn't enter my head? However, I shall have time to remedy my oversight. The cattle

were resting at Burliar for the day. They will come on about midnight and work slowly up the ghat at not more than a mile and a half an hour, if so much. They will pass this place about four in the morning. I'll have them followed and stopped at daylight, and I'll ride out and see for myself if the bamboos have been tampered with."

"You didn't notice anything peculiar about the appearance of the bamboos?"

"No; they were the last loads to come into Burliar. The carts arrived while we were looking at the grain. I was tired, and so were my men. I was strongly tempted to leave them alone and let the constables rest; but I didn't like the idea of shirking, so I made them turn the carts out. Government promised to send up some one to help in this inquiry, but they haven't kept their promise. I have a heap of other work on hand, an assault case, a theft from the railway shed, and a death where there's been foul play of some sort or other. We want a man who can give his whole time and attention to this abkarri business."

"You'll get one in time."

"Yes; after the whole affair is finished, and the person who has run the thing has made his pile and departed!"

"It's more detective work than police in my opinion. The uniform gives your men away, and puts every one on his guard."

"Right you are! I felt that myself when I sent some men out this morning on special duty."

"I think I saw two of them this evening beyond Chamra House," said Warborough.

"I dare say; I fancy that they won't have much to report."

"On the contrary, they should have quite a startling story to tell."

Lutterworth pricked up his ears and asked what he meant.

"A head constable and a younger man were waiting under that high cliff of rock. They spoke to me as I went by, thinking that I did not know my way. An hour later I was returning in the twilight. It was nearly dark. Just before I reached the part of the road where I saw the men, there came from the direction of the rock the most fiendish yell you ever heard. It startled me and my horse."

"Did you see anything?"

"Yes; and your fellows saw it too, for one of them screeched in sheer terror."

"What was it? an owl? or a panther or what?"

"It wasn't like any one of the things you have mentioned. It might have been a bit of cloud hanging in the valley against the face of the rock."

"Did it look like a cloud?"

Warborough smiled as he made his confession.

"You'll laugh, I suppose, if I admit that it seemed more like a diabolical spirit, an unhappy shrouded spook than anything else."

"You don't believe in ghosts?"

"No; I can't say I do."

"Then I suppose you took it to be some one dressed up and playing the ghost."

"That would have been the explanation I should have given but for two facts. One was the position of the figure. It was on the very centre of the face of the rock, a point to which no one could have climbed. The cliff is sheer and perpendicular, and I don't think that even a monkey could negotiate it."

"I believe you're right there."

"The second reason against its being a man masquerading was its size. It was ten feet high if an inch. It

had long thin arms draped in some ragged filmy stuff. The bony arms flapped up and down as if it were flying, and it gave a second and blood-curdling yell. This was too much for your fellows; they bolted."

"Did you see which way the ghost went?"

"No; it vanished just as suddenly as it appeared. My attention was diverted to the men. When I looked back the thing was gone. I tell you I began to wonder if my eyes had deceived me. It was such a preposterous apparition."

"You think that the men saw it as well as heard it."

"I am sure of it. It was the sight of the thing that made one of them yell. It really was enough to terrify any native believing as he does in demons and spooks."

Lutterworth was silent for a short while.

"Some fake to scare my men, I imagine," he said at length.

"Have they ever heard the cry or seen the ghost before?" asked Warborough.

"Not that I know of. I should have been told by one of my inspectors if there had been any attempt to terrorize the constables. Fright of that kind demoralizes a native completely. It's enough to give him fever and send him on the sick list for a fortnight. Neither of those two men will be fit for work to-morrow."

"I've heard the cry before—in the shola at the back of Chamra House. I was with Miss Armscote one afternoon about ten days ago. We were looking at the animals she keeps; and the scream came from the top of the jungle. She said that it was a hyæna, and that they had heard it before. The servants looked puzzled but not terrified."

"Was anything said about a devil having been seen in the shola?"

"I think not. Of course they all know the legend of the white giant spirits——"

"—who are afraid to come out and face the English; so the Budagas say. Do you suppose it could have been one of those large screech owls called a devil bird?"

"It might have been; but I've always understood that the devil bird belongs to the plains, and is not to be found on the hills."

"They make the most fiendish noise you ever heard. It's like a woman having her throat cut by slow degrees, and letting you know it. I heard one once in Travancore, and I shall never forget it, coming as it did in the silence of a calm still night," said Lutterworth.

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the inspector. After the Assistant Superintendent had given directions for the stopping of the carts loaded with bamboos, without mentioning any reason, the inspector told the tale of the apparition seen on the face of the rock up the Kotagiri road. It was exactly the same as Warborough's account except that it had grown slightly in detail. The white devil had pointed to Dodabetta; it had flown away in that direction accompanied by owls and bats. It had large fiery eyes and enormous teeth; and its face was of a pale green tint.

"Do you believe it was a devil?" asked Lutterworth of the man.

The inspector refused to commit himself. He was a caste man and held himself to be far superior to the pariah constables. They were demon worshippers, and he had no doubt but that devils existed for them. He himself worshipped at a big temple on the plains in the south dedicated to the Swami Siva, and he had no more to do with local devils than the English people.

"Then you think it was some one dressed up and playing the fool to frighten the men."

"If they had seen the figure on the road I should have said so, sir; but as it appeared on the face of the rock where no one can stand, what can I say? Perhaps the men saw a large yellow owl flying up to the top of the cliff. They haven't much sense, those pariah people."

He spoke with contempt, and Lutterworth did not contradict him. The human being is prone to belief in the supernatural; but no sooner is the supernatural manifested than disbelief creeps in, and the mind casts about for reasons to discredit eyes and ears.

"Don't put those two men on that beat again, and if you send any others up in that direction, give them permission to come back at sunset. I can't have the constables demoralized in this way."

"What about the night beats, sir?"

"I'll settle that to morrow. Good night, inspector. Have those carts followed and stopped so that we can lay our hands on them to-morrow at sunrise, and let me know early where I can find them."

A little later Warborough strolled back to the hotel. As he entered he heard the piano and Pensax's voice raised in song. He stood for a short while on the verandah listening. It was a passionate love song, a lover praying his love to forgive him and restore him to his former position in her affections. He craved her love and sympathy. "Give me thy love! Give me thy sympathy!" The voice was full of pleading and unrestrained emotion. In the solitude of his room the singer poured out his soul, not caring—if he thought at all of the matter—whether any chance listener heard or understood.

Warborough standing there not only heard, but fully comprehended the cry that came from the heart of the

other man. He divined to whom the song was addressed. What mysterious link could there be between the two? That one existed he was convinced. He felt as if he stood outside a locked door, behind which was hidden a secret. Had she loved Pensax? Had she given him a promise by which he had presumed to touch her hand and hold it with the right of possession? Did she still love him? If not why did she not send him away?

He recalled the evening he had stood with her by the gate. He could not forget the light that had suddenly sprung up in her eyes as they met his. He was sure that he read them aright. What was the meaning of it all?

"Ah! love! I am thine!" sang Pensax, entreaty merging into triumph, as he declared his passion to the night.

"Hang!" muttered Warborough, as he turned on his heel and sought his room.

CHAPTER XV

A NOTE from Lutterworth reached Warborough early in the morning before he was dressed. The sun was still below the horizon, although the sky in the east was light. It was to ask if he would like to ride with him to the spot where the carts were stopped.

Warborough ordered his horse, drank his early tea, and in half an hour the two men were on their way.

"One of the carts has been held up beyond Wellington on the Ooty road. The other turned off in Coonoor and took the Kotagiri road. I've got constables with both. We'll look up the one on the Ooty road first."

They found the cart by a little stream at a bend in the road. The mountain runlet spread itself out into a pool in the corner. A large black gum tree on the other side of the road gave a welcome shade, tempting travellers to rest by the clear water. Grass and fern bordered the stream, and the scattered wisps of straw showed that it was a favourite halt.

The cattle belonging to the cart had slipped their necks from beneath the yoke. Though still tethered to it, they were free to munch the rice straw that formed their morning feed.

A group of blackened stones with a heap of grey ashes gave evidence that the driver and a companion travelling with him had heated some coffee, which with rice cakes served as their breakfast.

Beyond the gum tree the mimosa sent its long willowy arms up by the low wall. Its dewy foliage glistened in the slanting rays of the sun now shooting over Dodabetta's shoulder. The air was still cool and crisp, with a feeling of the night in it; and the men belonging to the cart had drawn their calico clothing over their heads in shawl fashion. They were seated by the water's edge waiting, with the resigned patience of their own cattle, for permission to proceed on their journey; since the big police master, as they called Lutterworth, had given the order.

A wood-pigeon that had been feeding on the Budagas' fields of grain fluttered into the black gum tree, intending to drink at the pool; but finding the place occupied by that terrifying creature, man, it flew off with a gentle coo to a more secluded part of the stream. Merry little wagtails with plumage of russet green and pale yellow waistcoats bustled about with short jerky flight, in great excitement over the presence of strangers so near their nesting-place. One of them fluttered, with drooping wing and an assumed limp like a mother partridge, in front of Warborough's horse in the ridiculous hope that the intruder would be beguiled into pursuit and lured away from the vicinity of the nest.

The driver and his companion greeted the Assistant Superintendent respectfully, and without any show of fear. For the last two hours they had been gossiping with the two police constables, telling them their own business and hearing details of the various cases that occupied the attention of the police at the moment. The constables were not aware of the reason for the detention of the cart. It was enough for them as well as the driver that the order had been given by the authorities.

At Lutterworth's direction the cart was again unloaded,

and the bamboos—large strong staves, four and five inches in diameter—were closely examined. He had provided himself with a saw and gimlet, and he took the liberty in the interest of the law to make certain incisions.

"I had an impression that there were some shorter bits," said Lutterworth. He questioned the driver, who explained that they were in the other cart, the cart in which the cobra had been found. "Load up again," he said to the men, "and get on your journey. There's nothing wrong with your bamboos. Now for the other cart. I'm afraid we shall draw a blank."

The quest with its fruitless journeys, as has already been said, troubled him. His men were trustworthy as natives went. Where robbery and murder were concerned they would do their best according to their lights; but in the matter of smuggling a commodity that they all used more or less as a medicine as well as a luxury, he had no confidence in their integrity. They would buy the stuff from the hillmen without asking any questions.

The bugles sounded in the barrack square as they passed. The men were going to breakfast. Devon rode out of the main guard gateway and joined them, travelling as far as the fountain, where he turned off to the mess house. They trotted up the Coonoor hill and along the figure of eight to the club, where Warborough should have parted with Lutterworth if he intended to return to the hotel.

"I may as well see you through with it, and I'm rather curious about the result," he said as they took the road together up the valley.

Just beyond Chamra House they came upon the second cart. There was only one man with the two constables, the driver. He, like his fellows on the Ooty road, had submitted to fate with a good grace. The cattle, released from the yoke, had been fed; and the remains of a fire by

the roadside showed that the driver himself had enjoyed an early meal. The bamboos were unloaded and examined with no better result.

"I thought there were two men with this cart as well," remarked Lutterworth. "I'm sure of it!"

He questioned the driver, who assured him over and over again that he was mistaken. Two men accompanied the other cart, one being connected with the building operations that were going on in Ooty. To this only one man was attached; himself, the driver.

Nor was he satisfied about the bamboos. He had a distinct recollection of some short extra thick pieces that lay at the bottom of the cart. They were fixed in his memory by the fact that the cobra was found among them. He asked the driver what had become of them.

"They were never in this cart, sir; they were to go to Ooty, and were loaded after the examination of the bamboos into the other."

Lutterworth and Warborough exchanged glances.

"Where did you meet the cart?" asked the Assistant Superintendent of his constables.

"About four miles below Coonoor," replied the elder man. "I came up along with it to this place, sir. The other constable joined me after the cart stopped, as the inspector thought that your honour might want the help of two men in moving the bamboos."

An anxious expression came over his face, as though he scented blame in the air and was afraid it might possibly be attached to himself. His mind was set at rest by the reply of his superior officer.

"Quite right! You had your orders and you carried them out. Were any of the bamboos delivered on the road?"

"No, sir; we stopped nowhere. The bullocks went

very slowly because the road was steep and they were tired; but they kept moving."

"And you rode by the side of the driver?"

"Yes, sir; there was no order that I should walk."

"Help the man to load up. He can go on and you can both return to the police-station. Report yourselves to the inspector and say what has been done."

Lutterworth and his companion were about to remount when Nonia appeared leading Teddy bear. She had been for a walk with her pet and was returning home.

"Good morning, Miss Armscote," said Lutterworth, with the unconscious cheeriness of a man who turns from an unpleasant task to something more congenial to his taste. "Is that the latest importation?" he asked, looking at the bear.

"Not quite the latest. A dear little mongoose is the very last addition to my happy family. I bought him from an Afghan on the Ooty road."

Though she addressed Lutterworth her eyes sought Warborough's. He had greeted her silently and then turned away, as though to leave Lutterworth in full possession of the conversation. The song of the evening before hung in his memory; and he felt that it would be wise to adopt an attitude that was at least defensive as far as he himself was concerned.

"I wonder that you dare lead that beast out alone. He might rise on his hind legs at any minute and give you a most unwelcome hug," said Lutterworth. "Although he is only half grown he is stronger in his muscles than you would think."

She laughed and again her eyes sought Warborough's; but they met with no response. He could not have forgotten Teddy's reception of him when he called not many

days ago. He gave no sign, however, of shared reminiscences; and seemed to have all his attention engaged in lengthening his stirrup leather.

"That is a compliment Teddy keeps for my visitors. If you call he will be ready to embrace you at the gate; that is to say, if he happens to be at liberty, which is not likely."

Still there was no sign from Warborough.

"I think I must come, just to see what sort of welcome I shall get from—may I say it?—Beauty and her beasts. But tell me, why are you walking Teddy out yourself? I thought you had a man and boy on purpose to look after your zoo."

"So I have; but Houssain is laid up and unable to go out. He says he only wants one day off; but I shall give him two."

"What's happened to him—fever?"

"I'm afraid it is nothing so innocent. Last night after I went to bed he had a fight with Periyar, the Hindu watchman, and I fancy they punished each other rather severely."

"Been drinking?"

"I don't think that was the cause. There has always been bad blood between them——"

"Did you ever know a Muhammadan and a Hindu between whom there wasn't bad blood? Why, it's born in them, bred in their bones, and they can't help themselves."

"Houssain accused Periyar of stealing something that belonged to him. I couldn't make out exactly what it was; a horn of some kind, I think Houssain said. At any rate it was some treasured possession that he valued very highly. I don't know what Periyar was doing at the godowns so late at night. He says he was looking after his garden. The porcupines have been at his root crop again. They

are as destructive as pigs. I have a suspicion that he had set traps, and he was waiting to be on the spot if anything was caught. He was afraid I should hear it shriek. To add to the trouble, Houssain's monkey became very excited; it's a miracle that Periyar was not badly bitten. Abdul came to the rescue and held the monkey down till the butler had separated the two men. It sounds rather a shocking tale, doesn't it?"

"What has Periyar to say?" asked Lutterworth.

"He complains that Houssain was watching him; that he is always dogging his steps and spying upon him."

"Which looks as if the Muhammadan suspected the Hindu of being dishonest. Can't you get rid of Periyar?"

"It is impossible because he is not my servant. I have tried to point this out to the landlord, but no notice is taken of my representation."

"Can I help you? If you can prove that he has taken anything, garden stuff, the animals' food, anything that is yours, I can easily bring pressure to bear on the landlord and have him removed."

"I can't be unfair; I have positively nothing at all against the man except that he and Houssain frequently quarrel."

"Dismiss Houssain, then, unless he is more careful to keep the peace."

"Oh! I couldn't do that. Houssain must stay with me whatever happens. Don't you agree with me, Captain Warborough? You know how useful he is," she said, suddenly appealing to him.

He was obliged in common politeness to make some sort of reply.

"With all those animals you certainly require a man of some sort to look after them and control them," he said diffidently, his face without expression.

"I'll tell you what, Miss Armscote!" said Lutterworth. "You threaten both of them with the police and say you have spoken to me, and that I am going to send up a constable if I hear anything more of their fighting."

"Thank you; I will. Captain Warborough, you promised to show me your photographs. Don't forget your promise."

Something in her voice appealed to him, and he softened slightly.

"You shall see them, of course, if you wish. I'll send them up by the syce this evening."

He felt a brute as he said the words. He caught a glimpse of a pathetic little lifting of the eyebrow that reminded him of a child who had unwittingly offended and wondered wherein the offence lay. He had to harden his heart, not so much against her as against his own weakness. His love, if love it was, must be killed at all costs, even if in the killing of it she was hurt. He must keep rigidly on the defensive. How could she be hurt if she was attached to Pensax, as he had every right to believe? She was not the sort of woman to be playing fast and loose with half a dozen men—to be scalp-hunting. He had too good an opinion of her to accuse her of that.

"Can't you bring them yourself?" she asked. "Then you can explain how and when they were taken."

He was only human. It was impossible to resist the appeal, not only of the words, but also of the tone. His rigid attitude broke down, and he felt ready to go to the end of the earth at her bidding, Pensax or no Pensax.

"I'll come this evening, if I may, after dinner," he said with a sudden spontaneous warmth that betrayed him.

"Yes—no! not to-night," she replied hastily and with a troubled expression. "I have some one coming to dinner this evening."

His manner altered instantly. She was conscious of the change and felt it keenly.

"Another time, perhaps," he said with his former cold reserve. Not a muscle moved on his face. Had it not been for the tone in which he spoke she might not have observed the change. He put his foot in the stirrup, which seemed now adjusted to his satisfaction, and swung himself into the saddle. He knew instinctively that her eyes were seeking his, but he avoided them. Lutterworth, who was anxious to get back, followed his example.

"Don't forget, Captain Warborough," said Nonia in a clear voice. "You are to come and show me your photographs before long. I will take care that Teddy is not there to welcome you. I will be at the gate myself."

What more could man have desired? but he gave no sign, except a formal word of thanks in which there was neither anticipation nor gratitude.

"Good-bye, Miss Armscote," said the police officer, cheerily. "If I can do anything for you with those two men of yours, let me know. I'll run them both in for assault and breach of the peace; and lock 'em up if you only say the word."

"You may take Periyar and keep him as long as you like. I can't spare Houssain; indeed, I can't! I have very few friends, and he is one of the best."

Though she spoke to Lutterworth her words reached Warborough's ears. It required an effort on his part to restrain the impulse that prompted him to give some little sign, even if it were only a sympathetic glance that would show her he understood; he was ready and more than ready with his friendship if she would have it. He was conscious of an insane desire to leap from his horse; to take her then and there in his arms with an imperious claim to the right to stand by her in the position of

something more than a friend. The whole world might know it.

He touched his horse and the animal moved down the road. He half turned and lifted his hat with a "Good morning, Miss Armscote," and the two men trotted away.

"Poor little girl!" said Lutterworth. "I'm sorry for her, wasting her love on those beasts and that old Muhammadan. I wonder why Tredmere doesn't have her home to live with him? It must be very lonely for her out here."

"I suppose it is her own choice," replied Warborough, impassively.

"Queer chap!" thought Lutterworth, glancing sideways at his companion. "Wish she had asked me to come up and show her some photographs!"

Like Mrs. Cotheridge, he put him down as woodenheaded; by which was implied an indifference to feminine charms of any kind. His opinion was confirmed when Warborough made his next remark.

"Those bamboos have been tampered with."

"There's no doubt about it," replied Lutterworth, pulling his horse into a walk as they came to a steeper part of the road. "The short thick pieces that I noted at Burliar when they unloaded the carts have disappeared; which makes me morally certain that they were plugged with that dashed stuff. They have been dropped somewhere on the road; and the second man who is missing has remained behind in charge of them."

"Do you think your constable is in the secret?"

"Not necessarily," replied Lutterworth, who was loyal to his men and preferred to believe in their integrity unless he had good reason for the contrary. "He admits that he sat by the side of the driver. Probably both he and the cartman slept. It is only the first driver of a string of

carts who is obliged to keep awake to guide the cattle; and he need not be very wide awake, for there is only one road, and it is as well known to the cattle as to the men. The cart might have been emptied from behind in transit of all its bamboos over and over again without their knowledge. No; the bamboos are lost to us this time. We shall have to watch for the next consignment; confound the fellows!"

Nonia glanced at the two men riding away. Teddy bear had behaved beautifully during the conversation. He was always more amenable to discipline upon the road than in the forest. The trees and rocks and rivers did not speak on the highway as in the jungle; the "call of the wild" was less insistent where man trafficked up and down. So Teddy sat upon his haunches and behaved like a good boy, as Abdul would have said, while his mistress lingered.

At her bidding he shambled along beside her towards Chamra House where his breakfast awaited him. Nonia walked fast, and he had to break into a clumsy trot to keep pace; not that she was in any great hurry to get home, although it was near the breakfast hour. The pace suited her frame of mind. Something had gone wrong, and a change had come over Warborough. An unaccountable shadow had sprung up between them since the time when he had loitered in the garden with her, and had chaffed her about her weakness for the halt, the maimed and the blind in the animal world. She could not believe that he had taken offence at Teddy's behaviour. He was not the kind of man to be offended at a trivial incident, the result of mere accident. He was a broad-minded man of wide sympathies, as strong in mind as in body, a very rock of strength for a weaker character to lean upon.

Somehow he reminded her of the Hoolicul Droog, the magnificent mountain that guarded the pass; standing

aloof from the mass of hills; wrapped in its veil of azure; its unchanging eyes looking across that wonderful plain lying about its feet.

When she had handed over the eager and hungry young bear to Abdul, she turned her steps towards the lawn. The breakfast bell rang, but she paid no heed to it. The Hoolicul Droog was calling her and she went obediently to greet it. She stood at the edge of the terraced lawn and gazed across the wide expanse of green wooded country with something approaching to worship. Had she been a native woman she would assuredly have done pujah to the mountain as it lay like a couching lion, its head in the region of the clouds, its feet upon the warm plains among the palms and bamboos, its western flanks washed by the turbulent Bowani river, its eastern side a rugged precipice with skirts of primeval forest.

Trees and rocks stood out sharply where the light caught jungle and cliff, too clearly to promise a long continuance of fine weather. Clouds and storms lay in the future. Beneath the shadow of the storm cloud Nonia had often seen the Droog grow dark and lowering. Creatures that rejoiced in sunlight—birds, beasts, insects, reptiles—crept to rock and forest for protection. The thunder might roar and the rain descend in torrents; the Droog stood immovable and unaltered in outline, sheltering those it loved from wind and storm.

She thought of Warborough. It was what he would do for those he loved.

What was wrong? What cloud had risen to shut the sunlight out of her life?

Her train of thought was broken by the sight of Periyar crossing the lower terrace from the plantation of gum trees beyond the tennis courts. He was on his way to his own plot of ground on the other side of the mimosa hedge.

He was surprised to see her, as at this hour she was usually at breakfast. Throwing down the load of staves he was carrying, he ran towards the upper lawn, climbed the sloping grass bank and approached with the palms of his hands placed together.

"This poor slave! this worm! prays forgiveness for trouble made last night! Missie please forgive poor sorry man!"

"You should not fight, Periyar. It is against the rules of my house."

"It was Houssain's fault. Very sorry, missie!"

"It mustn't happen again. I have spoken to the police officer, Mr. Lutterworth, and he says that if you quarrel and fight again he will put you in prison."

At the mention of the police Periyar's face wore an anxious expression, and he showed signs of being in some way perturbed.

"Not my fault, lady! That pig of a Muhammadan is always watching, watching, watching. I am an honest man. Missie never missing anything. What for should I be watchman if not to keep-take-care of everything belonging to missie? Must speak to Houssain and give order not to watch poor Periyar!"

"Why were you at the servants' quarters last night? There is no order for watching the godowns."

"No, lady; I was on my way to the garden, my own poor little bit of land. The thorn-pigs have been rooting up my carrots. Many rupees' worth have they eaten; and I am a poor man! I sat up to frighten them away, and while I watched I made a water-pipe of split bamboo to carry the water from the stream in the jungle to the garden. I will show missie."

He leaped down to where he had left the bamboos and brought a section up for her to see.

"Yes; I understand," she said, looking at the bamboo indifferently.

Her own gardener used the same device for bringing the stream to the different parts of the flower garden. It was an ingenious contrivance, common enough on the hills where a fall in the ground can be obtained. The split sections of hollow bamboos were arranged on cross-sticks, and the water flowed in a regulated stream from the higher ground when it was required. The channel was disconnected by the removal of a section, and the little open aqueduct left dry when the water was not needed.

"I will speak to Houssain. You can go, Periyar. Let there be no more trouble if you wish to keep out of the hands of the police."

It was fortunate indeed for the Hindu that neither Lutterworth nor Warborough had seen as much as Nonia had seen. It would not have required any further breach of the peace to bring about the threat that his mistress held over his head, that the police would take him in charge.

CHAPTER XVI

After a late breakfast, that served as early lunch as well, Warborough prepared for a long tramp in the hills. Slinging a light camera over his shoulder, he started off a little before noon to walk to a spot called Lady Canning's Seat. From there he hoped to find a track or footpath leading up to the high ground behind Teneriffe, whence he intended to steer towards Dodabetta. Long before reaching the mountain he should strike a road that led to the Wellington racecourse. It meant a long round, but he was in a mood for it.

The expedition could only be done on foot; a good walk might serve to clear his mind of certain thoughts that recurred more often than he liked. He was anxious to get some snap-shots of Toda buffaloes. A herd would probably be found grazing on the wild open ground between Coonoor and Kotagiri. On the map a footpath was marked leading from the road that passed Lady Canning's Seat into the hills. The road itself continued along the edge of the hill, and eventually reached Kotagiri and some villages beyond.

The sky was clear and of an intense blue. The air still blew fresh and cool enough to make walking a pleasure, although the sun was hot.

He turned down the valley towards Tiger Hill. The shola was full of rejoicing birds, green barbets, Nilgiri robins, and the ploughboy thrush, that whistled to its

mate across the rocky stream like its namesake in the old country. As he lingered on the wooden bridge that carried the road over the stream, and looked down at the limpid water bubbling over its stony bed beneath a fringe of graceful fern, he heard the hum of a motor-car coming down the hill behind him. It was Berringham, and with him were Pansy and Ivy Cotheridge. Berringham pulled up.

"Hello! Warborough! What are you doing here?"

"I'm on my way to Lady Canning's Seat, which I have never yet had time to see. Then from there I thought of going up to the top of the hills. I want to find some Toda buffaloes and get a snap-shot or two, if possible. I may see some Toda ladies as well."

"Get in the car and come with us. We're going as far as Lady Canning's Seat if the road is good enough for the car. Devon has ridden on in front. He went off a couple of hours ago to look for a place where we might bivouac for supper on a night march. It is a little difficult to find space enough for the whole regiment."

"Won't it be fun!" cried Ivy, her eyes sparkling with pleasant anticipation. "Major Berringham has asked us and a lot of others to join."

"Not in the march, I hope," said Warborough, with a smile at her enthusiasm.

"Oh! the actual march is not worth talking about!" replied Ivy. "The important part is the picnic. There'll be a camp fire and cauldrons of Irish stew for the men; and afterwards they will sit round the fire and sing songs and smoke. But do get in, Captain Warborough."

"Thanks; if I'm not taking the place of any one else."

"Yes; get in and drive with us as far as we go," said Berringham. "I asked Mrs. Cotheridge to come, and she

promised she would; but at the last moment her heart failed her and she refused; so there's a seat to spare till we pick up Devon."

Pansy was sitting by Berringham's side. Ivy had the back seat all to herself, and she welcomed a companion; for part of her enjoyment in life consisted of chattering, an amusement that necessitated a listener.

"Yes," said Ivy, as they drove on, "mother had a fit of nerves just before we started. She had visions of the car taking over command and tobogganing down the hillside into the valley below. I wonder if I shall be as nervous about new inventions when I am dear old mum's age?"

"I don't see any sign of it in you at present," said Warborough.

"That's because I'm still young. Nerves as a rule don't come till you're fifty. In the interests of progress I can see the advantage of the old people dying off; I mean the very old, of course."

He glanced at her with a look of inquiry, as though he would like to know if she thought it time that her own parents were removed. She interpreted it aright and reassured him.

"I'm thinking of my great-great-grandmothers, for whom I may as well confess I have no sort of feeling except a vague sense of thankfulness that they were respectably born and brought up, two things they couldn't possibly take credit for as their own doing. Do you feel any affection for your great-greats? You had as many as eight, you know."

"Had I? Oh yes! I suppose I had! it sounds an awful lot, doesn't it?"

"So it is; or rather would be, if they were all alive together with your four greats and your two grandmothers.

Just fancy! fourteen old women in all! Supposing now that you got aeroplaning on the brain and bought a flying machine. Can't you imagine the worry that a crowd of fourteen grandmothers would be when you wanted to fly! One dear comfortable altogether-to-be-desired mother is enough for me when it comes to motor riding on rough hill roads. You should have heard her clucking this morning like a darling old hen!"

"I'm sorry she was unhappy. You and your sister are perfectly safe with Berringham."

"Of course we are, or we shouldn't have come! but we couldn't convince mother, and she was sure we should be killed. It will be a change for her to think out our epitaphs instead of speculating on our future husbands," said the irrepressible Ivy. "She's a dear! always considering us or dad, and never worrying about herself."

Warborough could not help laughing. "Then you don't want to get rid of her yet," he said.

"Rather not! but I can't help feeling glad that the great-greats are gone. I should have no use for them whatever. Just think what that army of old grannies would have said if they could have seen us start this morning! and how they would have backed up darling old mumsie in her nervous attack!"

"They might have been brought to reason," suggested Warborough.

"Now, tell me honestly, Captain Warborough, did you ever come across any man or woman of seventy—my fourteen grands would all be well over that age, so would yours—who would even listen to a modern up-to-date reason? No, of course you haven't! Old people don't grow new reasons any more than they grow new teeth or new crops of hair. We should never be able to break out in a fresh line or do anything risky, if we had our

great-greats to bring their combined influence to bear on us. They would obstruct progress tooth and nail."

They had climbed the road round Tiger Hill and passed through a tea plantation. The even growth of the pruned bushes spoke of the controlling hand of man. Warborough at least was glad to get away from disciplined nature and find himself in the wild again.

A turn of the road brought them out on the open hill side. Ivy stopped in her chatter to exclaim at the scene that met their eyes.

From the edge of the very highway itself the ground fell away in steep declivities to the valley below. The slopes were thickly clothed with vegetation except where the grey rock upreared its crags. The trees at the higher elevation carried thick crowns of glossy evergreen foliage. The reflected rays of the midday sun outlined each tree with an auriole of light never seen in temperate climates. Lower down the evergreens gave place to deciduous vegetation and vast tracts of feathery bamboos, that extended to the foot of the hills and joined hands with the grey-green cactus and thorny babul trees of the plain.

"Oh! look at the Droog!" cried Ivy.

"—— and the plains!" added Pansy.

Berringham heard their exclamations with the pride and satisfaction of a successful showman; but somehow on Warborough's ears their simple remarks jarred. He felt that Nonia would have greeted the magnificent view differently. To her it would not have been a show to be talked about and praised like a scene on the boards of a theatre. It would have been met by a deepening of the eye and a catching of the breath; by an eloquent silence that expressed a sympathy far beyond the ken of his companions. It set his teeth on edge still more when Berringham said complacently—

"I'm glad you like it; it really is very fine, very fine indeed!"

The broad expanse of level country stretching away to the south was like a vast ocean lying calm and motionless in an opalescent haze of heat. Through the thin veil of atmosphere the lakes and tanks shone with a silver gleam. Long roads—highways from the great cities of the north to the temples of the south—were distinguishable by their wonderful avenues of banyan and tamarind trees, giants of welcome shade to the traveller, but mere tufts of soft green on the golden land at that distance.

The Bowani river, sobered by the level of the plains and no longer turbulent, flowed seawards, a silver band on a ribbon of yellow sand. A town of mud-built houses clustered upon its banks round a shrine that lifted its wedge-shaped tower above the low tiled roofs. About the town, and on either side of the river, the plain was patched with green ricefields watered by canals that were like threads of shining white silk.

From the height at which they stood, the horizon seemed to be raised to the very clouds; and the big trees as they receded merged into lines of grey under the haze of heat till they were lost in the sky.

The hot air came up from below in gentle puffs that could be felt. Ivy pointed out with another little exclamation of delight a beautiful bird in gold and black plumage. It had wandered up the hillside in the warm sunlight with its mate, still more resplendent in fiery scarlet and black. They fluttered in and out of the green foliage of a forest tree, twittering with greedy pleasure at its wealth of berries. Over the abyss and level with the road floated a vulture with motionless wings ready to drop like a stone upon snake or lizard or young bird below.

"We must be moving," said Berringham, "or we shall be late with the lunch."

He had stopped the car that they might have leisure to look. Starting on again he drove slowly over the rough mountain road. On one hand was the rising hill with its ravines and sholas of old forest trees, stretching upwards to the very summit of the mountains. On the other was the pass through which road and railway ran, with that wonderful view of level plain beyond, that stretched away unbroken by hill or valley to the Gulf of Manaar, and the temple of Rameswaram. Sometimes the view was lost in passing through a belt of forest. The gnarled old trees, with their mossy branches interlaced overhead, shut out all but the tangle of tree-fern and creeper, shrub and boulder, that fenced the road. When they left the jungle the sun burst upon them with its dazzling golden light, and revealed again the wondrous length and breadth of southern India.

A stream fell down the mountain-side and passed over a high wall of rock in a multitude of glistening runnels. Its bed was set with tree-ferns, balsams, briars, creepers, and flowering shrubs. Below the little precipice the water spread out into a shallow pool and ran over the road, spilling itself into the valley in a line of white foam. Ivy called to Berringham and asked if they might not stop; it was the very place for a picnic.

"I should love to have a scramble over the rocks. And, oh! Pansy! Do you think we might paddle? Captain Warborough, don't you love paddling?"

"You wouldn't like it at all, Ivy," replied her sister. "You would be bitten by a leech or a water-scorpion or a snake."

"How dreadful! Perhaps we had better go on, then; but I'm distinctly disappointed."

They left Lamb's Rock brooding over the valley below them—a grand cliff jutting out into the pass, for ever dwarfed and belittled by the still grander Droog on the opposite side—and followed the road round a spur of the hills. They were between five and six thousand feet above the plains upon which they had been gazing. As they drew more towards the east another vista opened gradually, with a change in the character of the country.

The point known as Lady Canning's Seat was reached. It must have been chosen for the view and not as a shady retreat. A crag of dark gneiss stood out above the jungle that clothed the hillside, and the so-called seat was on the top of it. The travellers drew up; leaving the car, they went down to the little shelter erected on the rock.

The scene below appeared to be one large forest with miles and miles of dark green trees of a uniform colour. No silvery pools or rivers were visible with green and golden patches of cultivation; no ant-heaps of towns and lines of avenued roads a thousand years old or more were to be seen. The world was a vast forest that lay sweltering under a cloudless tropical sky that was like burnished brass.

In the still shade of those trees lurked the tiger and panther, the wild pig and the timid deer. Pythons and rock snakes with prismatic scales sunned themselves secure from the crushing heel of man; and birds and butterflies of gorgeous hues made playgrounds of the orchid-laden branches.

The forest ended in the Shevaroy Hills that rose in a line of ethereal blue. They stood in soft distinct outline against the sky. The mountain-loving Lady Canning also visited the Shevaroys and chose a similar Seat from which the same forest might be seen with the higher range of the Nilgiris as a background.

A voice hailed them from the road above as they stood in the shelter on the rock.

"There's Devon!" exclaimed Berringham, breaking off in a laudatory comment on the landscape such as he might have bestowed upon one of his own horses. Warborough, standing a little aloof, was trying to picture the heart of that forest with its strange voices at dawn and its midday silences, its many watchful eyes at night. "Hello! Here we are!" Berringham called back. "Come down and look at the view, it's well worth seeing."

Devon had already handed his horse over to the syce to lead home, an errand the man set about with alacrity, for it was already his dinner hour; and he joined them promptly.

"I say! What shooting!" was his comment as he let his eyes wander over the vast tract. "It would take half a lifetime to work through that forest. There must be parts where the sportsman has never yet set foot."

"The Englishman, perhaps; but not so the native. There are lots of villages hidden in those trees if you could only see them; and most of the forest is Government reserve. Those jungle people are born sportsmen; but their ways are not our ways; they trap and net and dig pitfalls."

"The brutes!" commented Devon.

"What luck had you in finding a place for the bivouac?" asked Berringham.

"Not much. I think the old spot on Tiger Hill will be best after all."

"I'm sure you can't improve on it," remarked Pansy. "It's an ideal place for a large picnic, a good road for the bullock-carts and plenty of room."

"Miss Cotheridge is quite right," said Berringham, with approval. What a sensible girl she was! "About

a place for our lunch to-day; we can't picnic here; it's too sunny and hot."

"There's nothing very tempting further on, no shade to speak of."

"Then we had better go back to the waterfall," said Pansy with decision. "Don't you think so, Major Berringham?"

"How delightful!" cried Ivy. "Do you think Pansy's word is to be trusted about those snakes and water scorpions?"

"We'll see when we get there," replied Berringham. "But what will your mother say if it's paddling you're thinking of?"

"I'll ask her when I get home. In dealing with mumsie I have to use discretion. There's no difficulty about some things that I want to do. She says yes like the dear old angel she is. In others I have to act first and ask permission afterwards, as it would be quite probable that she wouldn't be able to see the matter with my eyes. In this case the obvious course to take is to ask permission afterwards—that is to say, if you can set my mind at rest about the leeches and the other abominations."

"I can only be sure about the snakes and scorpions. The leeches are so small that I shan't be able to see them until they begin to swell."

"You can't possibly pull them off till they have finished," said Pansy. "Can you, Captain Warborough?"

"Quite so!" he replied, his eyes twinkling. "It's a very bad plan to pull them off at all. You ought to wait till they drop off; the places bleed less that way."

"I shan't paddle," decided Ivy, with a virtuous expression of filial duty. "I feel sure mumsie wouldn't like it, and I should be sorry to vex her."

"I think you will be wise," said Berringham, as he assisted her into the car.

"Don't mind what he says, Miss Ivy," said Warborough. "You paddle if you like, and I'll come and help you. It will be quite all right. There aren't any snakes and leeches up here; they're down in the jungle where it's much warmer."

"Aren't you coming with us, Warborough?" asked Berringham. "I am sure we can make room."

"No, thanks; I shall go on and carry out my plan of climbing up to the high ground above this."

"What about lunch?"

"Oh! that's all right! I have some sandwiches with me."

"You're going to look for Toda buffaloes. They're nasty things to meet on the moorland, Captain Warborough," said Ivy. "Let me give you a bit of advice. If you find yourself attacked lie on your back and kick the beasts in the nose, and yell at them for all you're worth. I've been advised to do it if ever I meet any wild beasts. The man who gave me the advice was a great sportsman. He said it had saved him more than once."

"He was pulling your leg," remarked Pansy, complacently.

"Not at all!" her sister replied with indignation. "You try it, Captain Warborough."

"Don't," said Pansy. "Heave rocks at the beast."

"And coo like a woodpigeon," added Devon.

"Or cry like a small kid, and then the brutes will think the herd-boy is after them, and they'll run like jackals," counselled Berringham, as he set the car in motion.

"Good-bye, you rotters," shouted Warborough after them.

"Captain Warborough always impresses me," remarked

Ivy when the laughter had subsided. She settled herself comfortably in a corner of the back seat more than content with the change of companion.

Pansy was by Berringham's side. He had no desire to alter the arrangement. He found her a delightful listener, ever ready to admire the objects he pointed out. She had no fads about animals, no inclination to stop on the road and feed passing bullocks with lumps of sugar.

"He's a good fellow," said Devon, with the awkwardness of a man who hates commenting on a friend.

"I didn't mean anything personal. I was thinking of his occupations. He gives me the impression of a man who is looking for something that he has lost."

"Buffaloes, for instance."

"It's something more important than buffaloes," she replied with a wise nod of the head.

"The herd-boy perhaps."

"Suggest something else. You have no originality, Captain Devon."

"Oh, haven't I? Shall I tell you what Pensax says. He's staying at the same hotel, and he thinks that Warborough is taking films for moving pictures."

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Ivy, assailed by a sudden thought. "The horrid wretch! Of course! I see it all now! That was why he wanted me to paddle. He would have snapped me off and sent me—ME—home to be shown on a screen. I'll never speak to him again!"

The car stopped at the waterfall. The old trees cast a broad line of shadow and the air was cool under their thick foliage. It did not take long for the two men to bring out the baskets, while Pansy occupied herself in laying the cloth and arranging the rugs. Ivy made many promises of assistance, but the shallows proved too strong an attraction, and she was so busy looking for the dreaded

snakes and scorpions that she could not fulfil her offers. Berringham was quite content with her sister. What a capital girl she was at a picnic, and how well she understood what he wanted!

"Lunch is ready, Miss Ivy," said Devon, holding out his hand to help her off the rock on which she had perched herself.

"I think I've found a place where there are no snakes or leeches. The water is as clear as glass. If only Captain Warborough were here, I really think I should paddle just to give him a subject for his camera," said Ivy presently.

"I understood that you were so shocked at the idea of being photographed," said Devon in some surprise.

"Second thoughts are best," replied Ivy, helping herself to the cucumber he was handing round. "In the interests of the public it would have been your duty and mine to pose with the waterfall behind us. It would show them that they haven't got a monopoly of mixed bathing at home; that the practice is general all over the world."

"Mixed bathing, Ivy? Paddling is not bathing," said Pansy.

"It's the preliminary step. However, as Captain Warborough isn't here, I shall not paddle. There are some black spots at the bottom of the pool which look suspicious. They may be dead leaves, they may be leeches. I shall respect the feelings at my eight great-great-grandmothers and give it up. I am sure they wouldn't have liked it."

"Your eight great-great-grandmothers!" exclaimed Devon in wonderment. "What do you mean?" Which question gave Ivy a second opportunity of propounding her theories of the unreasonableness of age and the sweet reasonableness of youth. And lest he should suspect her of unfilial feelings, she assured him that her mother was still young in thought in spite of her nerves.

"By careful watching we keep mumsie young. She has lapses now and then, but we always bring her up to her bearings again."

"What about your father?"

"Oh! he's an old dear, and doesn't count. We all pet him because mother likes it, and nobody pays any attention to what he says."

CHAPTER XVII

Warborough smiled as he watched the car with its load of happy people making merry at his expense. They disappeared round a corner of the road, and he turned to look once more at the forest below.

It was at the hottest part of the day ; the heat quivered over the plains and rose in hot gusts, warning him that it was time he too moved on and sought a cooler atmosphere. He followed the road, which dipped into an airless ravine and then climbed over the shoulder of a sun-baked hill. His eyes sought everywhere for sign of footpath that might lead to the top of the hill ; but in spite of his close search he could detect nothing of the kind.

He was just wondering if it would be wise to give up his quest and return by the way he came—he had no desire to follow the highway as far as Kotagiri—when a hill man bearing a bag of grain on his shoulders emerged from the jungle below the road. He was bare to the waist ; his brown satin-like skin shone in the sun like the glossy foliage of his own evergreen jungle.

He crossed the road with a long springing step and bending knees, just in front of Warborough, and began to enter the maze of scrub on the hill above. Here was the very person he wanted, and he called to him to stop. The man turned instantly and stood still with the obedience characteristic of the agricultural population of India.

He asked no question, but waited for the Englishman to speak.

The vernacular was a closed book to Warborough; but the half-civilized man is always an adept at the language of signs. It took but a short time to convey the information that he required a guide up the hill. A rupee made matters still clearer, and they started at once, the Budaga leading.

As they plunged into the vegetation, which varied in height from three to twelve feet, a lark flew up from behind a bush of purple blossom, and rose into the air singing its familiar song that needed no interpreter.

Warborough could see no sign of a track as he followed his guide, and he was puzzled to know how he found the way. The Budaga never faltered or seemed in any doubt. Frequently he turned aside for some enormous boulder or jutting rock that obstructed the way, skirting round and passing behind it. Sometimes a brawling little stream that burrowed under rocks and hid itself in thick impenetrable undergrowth barred their progress. Then he pushed aside a branch or two and revealed a narrow track to the water's edge; and two or three rocks served as stepping-stones to cross the stream.

On and on they went, the dweller in the hills never altering his pace whether the ground was rough and steep or fairly easy going. Nor did he stagger under the weight of that heavy load or seem out of breath. More than once Warborough was constrained to call a halt. The rarefied air at that height tried his lungs and quickened his pulse. At such moments he had time to turn and look again at the marvellous extent of the country below, with its horizon climbing skywards as he drew nearer to the top of the mountain.

The jungle ended abruptly on the summit, and the land

stretched away in open moorland to the north towards the Mysore plateau. For the most part it was wild and broken by rocks and patches of stunted scrub.

The Budaga with the same unerring instinct would have continued his way due north, for in that direction his village lay nestling in a sheltered valley; but Warborough again called a halt. Having arrived within sight of certain landmarks he no longer required a guide; moreover, he wanted to work round towards the west. He mentioned the word Jackatalla, the name of the spot on which the Wellington barracks stood. A wag of the head showed that his guide comprehended. The man pointed to a mountain mass rising some two thousand feet above the plateau on which they stood, and Warborough recognized Dodabetta. The blue head of the Droog could still be seen in the south. With the two for landmarks he could not fail to find his way as long as he did not wander too far inland on the plateau.

He dismissed his guide, and turning westward along the track pointed out by the Budaga, walked on keeping Dodabetta for the present in front of him.

The sun no longer poured down with tropical heat upon his back; even the glare was modified. A keen breeze unsoftened by heated blasts from the plains blew from the north-east and sharpened his appetite, bringing to his mind the memory of the lunch he carried. The Budaga, now a small figure in the distance, also felt the change of atmosphere. He stopped to loosen the cloth which had been wound round his loins and shook it out till he could wrap it shawl fashion over his shoulders.

Warborough seated himself on a small boulder and pulled out his sandwiches. With the cessation of the sound of his own footsteps he became conscious of a strange silence. It was not the many-eyed silence of the jungle,

where the presence of trees and flowers, birds and butterflies, gave a sense of companionship, and where the eyes of nature spoke of pulsing vitality.

Here on the top of the mountains he was face to face with the mighty overpowering silence of solitude such as may be felt in the treeless desert. He was surrounded by a vast loneliness that seemed to stretch to the bare head of Dodabetta itself. He had lost sight of the plains altogether, the forest with its hidden beasts, its twittering birds, and humming insects; the cultivated fields with roads and pools, towns, and rivers. Not a creature was visible, but the rapidly retreating figure of the plodding unwearied Budaga who was already passing behind an out-cropping bit of living rock. Warborough's only companion was the invisible breeze that blew about his ears and rustled in the weather-beaten vegetation in which the boulder he sat upon was half buried.

In his present grim humour he preferred that rugged scene to the grace and beauty of the forest; but fortunately he had no time for rumination. He was there for a purpose, and it was not to think about himself or even to catch films of the semi-wild cattle of the Todas.

He pulled out a map and spread it on his knee, studying it closely. Then he turned his eye on the landscape and identified the hills with those marked on his chart.

"I've got to find that old gold-mine," he said to himself as he folded up the map. "I can't help thinking that it will give me the clue that I want."

The sky had lost its azure tint, and had whitened while he sat there. The sun still shone, but its molten gold had vanished. A transparent veil of silver gauze seemed to be hung about the heavens to shield the earth from the excessive heat.

He rose and resumed his way, following the track that

the Budaga had pointed out. It was better walking than the rough hillside, although it was not altogether level. Dark grey gneiss obtruded and depressions occurred. In places the ground was boggy, springs of water oozing up and forming shallow pools. Brown and grey waders stalked furtively in the swamp, filtering the water in their slender bills. They too seemed to feel the strange spell of the wild silence and rarely uttered a cry. As soon as they caught sight of him they flew noiselessly away over the surface of the water, and dropped behind a sheltering rock or tuft of reeds, effacing themselves completely.

Warborough was making for a particular point on the horizon to the west where the ground was broken up into a group of boulders. The great fragments of rocks were heaped together, as though they had been used as missiles in some titanic war in which the white giants of legend had taken part. The trees growing in between the rocks suggested that a shola reached them from below, and that probably there was a ravine by which he might descend to the road in the valley. To the south-west he thought he recognized in the far distance the line of jungle that clothed the hill behind Chamra House; and between that point and the rocks he was making for, he distinguished the sentinel tree that stood above the ghost's cliff, as he termed it.

As he proceeded the path grew less and less distinct. In places it disappeared altogether, and he wandered away from it. To take a bee-line was impossible on account of the pools and swamps and the uneven scrub that was sometimes shoulder high. There was nothing for it but to hark back till the path was recovered, and though he walked fast progress was in reality slow.

By four o'clock the white veil of the sky had thickened, and the sun was obliterated. The silver glare remained,

but the light was not reflected, and the rocks and trees deepened in tint. He wondered idly if it was going to rain.

A footpath more defined than that which he was following crossed his at right angles. He made a line upon his map. Unless he was mistaken, it was the path along which the Budaga was travelling who sold him the cigars. He moved on, the way becoming rougher and more rocky at each step. He was within about fifty yards of what he took to be the entrance of the ravine when he was startled by the sound of a heavy snort, followed by the deep breathing of some animal.

He glanced to the right and caught sight of a herd of buffaloes. They were of a deep dull brown, not unlike the tone of the rocks themselves. Unless they happened to be moving they were not easy to distinguish from the boulders among which they were feeding. Different from the buffaloes of the low country, whose hides are nearly bare of hair, these hill animals had shaggy brown hair on their shoulders. Their horns were longer than their brothers' of the plains, and there was a general appearance of better breeding and greater strength.

Warborough discovered that the herd was by this time standing more or less in a line regarding him intently down their raised muzzles, as if they were sighting him along the barrel of a rifle. Every now and then they expressed their distrust in grunting snorts.

The light was bad for photography; but he decided that he would make an attempt, as he might never have another opportunity, especially as he had been led to understand that it was unusual to meet a herd at this end of the plateau.

He pulled his camera forward and moved nearer to get the animals into focus. At the same time a large bull

advanced a few steps in front of the herd. This reduced the distance too much, and Warborough took a few steps backwards. The bull lowered his head and stamped his foot, expressing his outraged feelings in a sound that was a cross between the grunt of a boar and a hoarse bovine roar.

"Oh! so you're going to act up to your character, my friend," said Warborough. "You mean to be nasty; but I'm going to take your precious old portrait whether you like it or no."

Another grunt and the stones were scattered under the cloven hoofs as the bull stamped and swore in his own language at the intruder. The click of the shutter was the last straw to his forbearance. He lumbered forward in an awkward trot on mischief intent, giving Warborough no time to take a second photograph. The latter beat a retreat without delay, and ran towards a cleft in the rocks filled with vegetation that promised cover if not escape.

The cunning beast seemed to divine his intention. Instead of making directly for his enemy, he turned slightly and took a straight line for the sheltering cleft, intending to cut off Warborough's retreat.

The Englishman was too quick for him, however. He reached the cleft just in time to slip in between the two rocks, where he was screened by the thick green leafage. He heard the horns of the buffalo come against the rock with a dull thud, which did not serve to put its owner in any better temper. The bull drew back a few yards and stood waiting for his prey to emerge, like a terrier at a rat-hole. Warborough made himself as comfortable as he could under the circumstances, trusting that no snakes shared his chosen retreat; and resigned himself to the task of out-tiring the patience of the buffalo.

The mist that had veiled the sun came down upon the

earth in soft fragments and covered the landscape. It floated over the open moorland in fantastic wisps, curling and boiling as though stirred by an invisible giant hand. The breeze died down except for a gust or two at intervals. Warborough peeped out of his shelter. He could still discern the outline of the watcher. Occasionally the sound of a snort warned him that his foe had not forgotten his existence, and was lying in wait for him.

He remembered Teneriffe and its cloud cap, and began to speculate on the probability of the plateau wearing a night-cap as well. His hope was that the mountain peak, being some hundreds of feet higher than the spot where he was held prisoner, might draw the cloud to itself and set him free to attempt an escape. To do so in the thick mist not knowing the geography of the place would be madness.

For more than half an hour he remained in his shelter, making as little movement as possible, in the hope that his presence might be forgotten. At the end of that time he caught the sound of a childish voice raised to a shrill prolonged cry in the far distance. The herd responded with a chorus of grunts. The vicious old bull backed away, and pushing through his waiting cows he gave them a lead. There was a dull rattle of hoofs as the buffaloes, forgetful of all else but their little keeper, stampeded in the direction of the herd-boy's call.

"That's all right," said Warborough to himself, as he emerged from his hiding-place—"that's all right as far as those beasts are concerned; but how the deuce I'm to find my way to Coonoor I don't know. The mist is like a wall of cotton-wool."

He came to the conclusion that he could not stand there and wait till the cloud lifted. No harm could come of exploring as long as he kept near the rocks, and did not

go out on to the plateau. He had a compass in his pocket. Recalling how the country lay, he decided to go west.

Slowly he made his way by feeling rather than seeing along the edge of the forest, looking for something in the shape of a pathway that might lead him down the ravine. If he could find a mountain stream it would be some sort of a guide; but mountain streams did not as a rule start boldly and openly from the plateau. They gathered from the springs in the hillsides and became visible lower down. It was a blind search, and his instinct warned him that it would be wiser to wait till the cloud lifted, for he could see only ten or twelve yards in front of him.

Groping about among the huge fragments of granite that were like the overturned walls of some great castle, he came upon an opening where there was no vegetation to bar the way. He followed the passage and knocked his heavy boots against an object that gave out a metallic ring. Buried in long grass was a rusty plate of iron that had once formed part of the boiler of a small engine. Machinery! old rusted machinery!

His pulses stirred. By a wonderful piece of luck he had stumbled on the forsaken machinery of the old gold-mine. If so he must be close upon the shaft itself. He recalled the fact told him by Lutterworth that the shaft was not a perpendicular pit, but in the form of a steeply sloping galley or tunnel. Determined to continue his explorations, he looked at his watch. It was five o'clock. There were still nearly two hours of daylight in which to find the road that would take him back. He glanced up at the sky, it seemed lighter, the mist was certainly less thick, and he could distinguish trees and tangled jungle growing round the rocks, and more than half burying them in foliage. On one side lay a heap of iron wheels and axles suitable for trucks. Beyond them were some

steel rails. They were overgrown with wild guava bushes and brambles. On the other side was a narrow and well-used path leading into the enclosure.

He looked round; it seemed as though he had found his way into the keep of some ruined medieval castle, and he glanced upwards half expecting to see an old tower. Moving across the open space, to his surprise he came upon something that was in the shape of a real building.

It was a ruined bungalow built of stone. The casements were no longer in the windows; but there was a door which was shut and fastened with a padlock. He concluded that no one could be living in such an out-of-the-way place, and the door was probably kept locked to exclude the buffaloes, unless——

Full of curiosity he looked into one of the gaping windows. A few tables stood about; and in the corner of the room lay a stack of deck chairs folded and piled ready for use. One only was opened, and this was placed immediately below the window through which he was peering.

For what purpose were the chairs brought there? and what strange company assembled to use them? were the questions that presented themselves to his mind.

The window was low enough to admit of his entering. He listened for the sound of movement or of voices, but the place was wrapped in a silence as complete as the silence of the moorland. Birds and insects were hushed by the blinding mist; even the breeze had died down and ceased to whisper among the leaves.

He climbed through the open window and stood in the room. There was a smell of stale tobacco in the air, and of something else. A fire had been burning on the hearth recently, and it was evident that the place had been occupied not many days ago. A door leading into what

must have been the bedroom was shut and locked. He got back through the window to search for the one which should light the bedroom. He found it, but it was securely boarded up.

The fog was much thinner, and it was possible to see all round the enclosure. On the opposite side to the bungalow he came upon a kind of cave, the entrance partially concealed by jungle. This he also examined, and was rewarded by finding some empty earthen pots, a few large split bamboos and a red turban. This must be the opening leading into the old shaft. He would have liked to explore the tunnel, but it was time for him to be moving on unless he wished to be benighted. He had yet to find his way down into the valley and to strike a road that would lead him back to Coonoor. He walked towards the passage by which he had entered. A scrap of paper caught his eye, and he picked it up. It was the half of a playing card, the knave of hearts, and it told a tale, the explanation of which was not far to seek.

Outside matters had much improved. The sun had dropped low on the horizon, and its slanting rays were beginning to penetrate beneath the cloud. Like magic the veil lost its shroudlike whiteness and its fringe took on a golden hue. Wisps of vapour curled up over the rocks and trees, and the wind came in gusts, sending the cloud upwards. Clothed in a golden glory it floated away towards Teneriffe.

As Warborough came out of the enclosure he searched the horizon for trace of man or beast. The buffaloes were gone with their attendant imp ; and once more he had the plateau to himself with its wide solitudes on one side and the whispering forest trees on the other. The atmosphere was perfectly clear, not a trace of fog remained. As it descended without warning so it rose as abruptly,

leaving no trace of the cloud behind. He could not say how soon it might return or another take its place, and he was anxious to find some way down into the valley as soon as possible, for the sun was already dropping behind the hills in the west.

After a short hunt he came upon a track that led into the shola. It did not take long to reach the bottom of the hill. It was as he thought. The path joined the road; and by the light of the afterglow he had no difficulty in recognizing it as the Kotagiri highway. It was a better road for wheeled traffic than the other, which ran past Lady Canning's Seat. He was some way beyond the cliff where the ghost had appeared, and he calculated that he was about five or six miles from Coonoor. He had just time to get in to a late dinner.

As he swung down the smooth road at a steady unimpeded pace his brain worked on the discovery he had made. There were many links still wanting in the chain of evidence, and he could not trust the theories that presented themselves to his imagination without further proof. The two men he pitched upon as being likely agents in this contraband traffic were Periyar and Houssain. He had not forgotten Nonia's account of their quarrel which had been sufficiently severe to lead to blows. Doubtless they had fallen out over the profits of their illicit trade.

Of course the whole affair must come into the hands of the police sooner or later; but for the present he determined to keep his suspicions to himself. No one in Coonoor, not even Lutterworth himself, had a notion that the secret inquiry had already begun, and that Government had not been as dilatory as was supposed.

With the thought of the police a difficulty occurred to his mind. These two men were Nonia's servants. The Hindu she would be more than willing to part with even

if the man had to exchange her service for a jail; but with Houssain it would be quite another matter. She would refuse to believe in his guilt; and an accusation brought against him, even though it might be proved true in the end, would incur her lasting displeasure. Her heart was as soft for the sorrows and troubles of a human being as for the hurts of an animal. It was even possible that she might connive at the escape of the detested Periyar if he could succeed in raising her pity.

It was dark long before he reached Chamra House. He passed the gate, which he noted stood open ready for her guest, without so much as a glance. He had seen too much the last time he had turned his eyes that way.

A mile further down the road he came suddenly upon a man seated upon a horse that was standing by the side of the road. Pensax greeted him from the saddle.

"Hello, Warborough!" he cried cheerily, as though he was enjoying the best that the world had to offer.

"Is that you, Pensax? What are you doing here? Waiting for some one?" replied Warborough, resisting an impulse to walk on with a curt greeting.

"No; it's the Dark'un in his tantrums again," he replied with his boyish laugh. "He's asserting himself at a most convenient moment. I don't like to smoke before dinner; but really I shall be obliged to start a cigarette soon, or Miss Armscote will wonder what on earth has become of me. Have you been exploring again?"

"Call it sight-seeing. I drove as far as Lady Canning's Seat with Berringham; then took a long round over the hills. Got my Toda buffaloes at last."

"Glad they didn't get you. What's the country like up there? I've never been as far as that, although I'm bound to look over it before I've done with my prospecting."

"It's like——"

Pensax, in his eagerness to hear what Warborough had to say, drew up the reins. It was sufficient for the contrariness of the Dark'un. He started off at a tearing gallop, recognizing by the signal unconsciously given, that his master wanted him to stand still for a few minutes longer. If Pensax had not been an admirable rider he might have been unseated by the abrupt start.

Somehow as Warborough listened to the retreating hoofs of the Dark'un, the memory of the inconsequent chatter over Mrs. Oswald's tea-table came back. Pensax was going to the ball, so gossip said, as the Knave of Hearts. Was he riding up to dine with Nonia in that character? a gay attractive trifler? or had she given him a right to his welcome at Chamra House?

CHAPTER XVIII

Thanks to the Dark'un's sudden determination to cut short his master's conversation and continue his journey, Pensax was in good time to keep his appointment.

Nonia was in the drawing-room. She rose as he entered and advanced to greet him, giving him a frank friendly welcome that dispersed the slight feeling of embarrassment which the sight of her never failed to rouse.

"I thought I should be late," he said, with a contented laugh. "My horse jibbed on the way."

"You're in plenty of time. Aunt Mary is not out of her room yet."

A fire of logs burned on the hearth. The gum of the eucalyptus wood sputtered and sent up yellow flames that shed a pleasant glow over the room. A large shade confined the light of the standard lamp to a circle and kept the rest of the room in shadow. The little table holding books and magazines was placed close to the lamp, and the novel that Nonia had been reading was lying open just as she had laid it down when her visitor was announced. Easy-chairs stood round the lamp beyond the disc of light, the semicircle extending to embrace the hearth.

Flowers freshly gathered scented the air. Orange blossom, yellow tea roses, Neapolitan violets prevailed; there were jars and bowls of other spoils from the garden as well, cut with an extravagant hand.

Pleasant as the room had appeared by daylight, it was

still more cosy and homelike with the fire and lamp. It appealed strongly to Nonia's guest, and roused vague longings for a more settled life than that which he was at present leading.

"You've had a busy day as usual?" she asked as she sat down again, leaving him to choose his own chair. He sank into one that was next to hers and leaned back, turning so that he could see her. She was bending forward, her hands clapsed on her lap and her eyes upon the glancing flames. Her head was just within the circle of lamplight. A small diamond ornament scintillated in her hair. He knew it of old, and it brought back recollections of other days when they had been together.

"Yes; a busy day, not to say a worrying day. I'm very tired of this prospecting business."

"Why don't you give it up?"

"It's my daily bread. I must live, which is equivalent to saying that I must work. I wish I hadn't muffed my chances of Sandhurst or Woolwich when I was young. I might have done well—as well as Warborough, for instance; but I wouldn't work then."

"And you wouldn't work now, Dick, if you could help it."

"I'm not sure. Work—some kind of work—is becoming a habit. I couldn't live without occupation; but it would have to be of a more or less exciting kind. Where's that diamond necklace of yours, Nonia?"

"I've lent it to Miss Honington to wear at the ball."

"By-the-by, the dance is two days hence, isn't it? I must hurry on that tailor in the bazaar who has undertaken to make my fancy dress."

He spoke lazily and happily, as though life held many good things for him in spite of the necessity of having to work for them. Now and then he lapsed into a short

luxurious silence such as might occur between two members of a household who were on the best of terms.

"What character have you chosen?" she asked.

"Didn't you know? Knave of Hearts."

"How like you, Dick! I hope you are providing yourself with a pouch large enough for all the hearts you mean to capture."

"But not to keep," he added quickly. "There is only one I should care to keep if I could capture it."

"Let me warn you not to play tricks with Maud Honington's heart," said Nonia, ignoring his last remark. "She is too nice a girl to be made a fool of."

"Oh! I think she understands. The modern girl is no fool. She is too good a fellow—if she will allow me to use the term in all deference—too chummy to be deceived by a little wayside attention like mine."

"That's what you call your flirtations, is it?"

They both laughed, and Nonia turned from the fire to look at him, wondering if Maud had taken his true measure.

"How pleasant it is to have a fire! it reminds me of home," he said; but his eyes were on her and not upon the crackling logs.

"It is more for show than for use. The window is open; we have it open every evening. It is only in the monsoons when it is blowing and raining hard that we have to keep it shut."

A rustle of silk skirts at the door announced Miss Madersfield's arrival. Pensax rose and went to meet her with the alacrity he would have shown had she been thirty years younger. Where women were concerned he was habitually attentive. To men he was invariably courteous and pleasant, with the result that he was popular wherever he went. He had a craving to be liked, common to a great many people; and this desire was as much at

the root of pleasant manners as the desire to give pleasure to others.

Miss Madersfield had entered the room with a feeling of slight distrust and resentment. She did not approve altogether of this renewal of friendship between Nonia and Dick, and she wished him further. Nonia was foolish in having invited him; and Dick had done wrong in accepting the invitation. The consciousness of her disapproval caused a certain nervousness in her manner which Nonia was quick to perceive. She thought that Pensax also detected it.

"It's like old times, Mr. Pensax"—she was careful not to call him by his Christian name—"seeing you again. I wonder you haven't been before."

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than she regretted them; yet she could not get away from the subject.

"Very kind of you to say so," he replied quickly.

"Not at all!" she replied, floundering still deeper into difficulties. "It was not you that I was thinking of, but your uncle, Colonel Tredmere. I could almost fancy that we were waiting for him to join us for dinner; and that he would walk in presently and say, 'What's that cook about? She's two minutes behind her time.'"

"I'm very glad my uncle is not here. He wouldn't be best pleased to see me. I'm not sure that he wouldn't order me out of the house at a moment's notice," said Pensax, not attempting to mince matters or place them in a false light.

He had pushed a chair round for her so that they might all three sit together, and there could be no pairing off with the odd one left out. As he talked he stood with his hands upon the back waiting till she should seat herself before he resumed his own chair. However awkward she might

feel, there was no sign of embarrassment on his face. The smile of amusement on his lips at the thought of his uncle's action showed an entire absence of resentment on his part.

"Is that how you like to sit? or shall I put you nearer to the fire?" he asked.

"Thank you; it is exactly right," she replied, sinking down into the lounge with a little sigh of resignation. She and Nonia had been living by themselves for some time. It was a very pleasant change to receive a little attention of the kind Dick was showing. "Your uncle was always so good to us. I'm sure if he knew that Nonia had invited you, he would not wish to turn you out without your dinner. He continues his goodness to us by sending heaps of magazines and papers, and by writing regularly every mail. It was a great pity you offended him. How did it happen?"

"He was angry about something he heard of me in Africa. We had a stormy meeting and parting, and I left him with something to think about." He laughed at the memory of it.

"Oh, Dick! I have such a sad tale to tell you!" said Nonia, breaking into the conversation and lifting it bodily away from personalities that were not altogether safe. "Things have gone wrong in my happy family."

Pensax laughed softly. Her words had opened the flood-gates of happier recollections.

"Things were always going wrong in the old days with your pets. Do you remember how your darling Persian kitten made havoc among your dear little white mice? I'm using your own terms for the beasties. And your beautiful magpie, in spite of his broken leg, managed to damage the eye of the sweet terrier pup that stole his food?"

"Oh! don't, Dick! It was too dreadful! There are certain things I want to forget. It is cruel of you to remind me of them."

"It is much sweeter to remember even though pain is mingled with the pleasure." His eyes were bent upon hers with meaning. "It was a jolly little puppy dog, and its punishment was too heavy for its crime; for you had forgotten its dinner. I felt sorry for it. Did it lose its eye?"

"No; we saved it; but it was a long time before the dog recovered its spirit. Never mind the past. We'll let that alone with all its mistakes. I want to tell you what happened to-day."

The butler announced dinner, at the same time opening the door that led into the dining-room. A fire was burning here also. The room was illuminated by shaded lamps. Flowers abounded in the same profusion and scented the air. Nonia's hand was visible not only in the grouping of blossom, but also in the choice of the few pictures that hung on the walls, and in the collection of carved teak and rosewood and ebony furniture. The curtains and rugs were of Persian manufacture, the spoils of some trader's pack.

A sense of luxurious enjoyment crept over Pensax, such as he had not experienced since he was driven out of his uncle's house under a cloud of heavy displeasure. The food, the wine, the servants were all of the best, like the rest of the appointments. Nothing escaped his appreciative eye; and as he unobtrusively noted every detail he understood that it was money and taste which had obtained such results; and the money and taste were Nonia's and none other's.

"There has been trouble among my poor beasties owing to Houssain's absence on sick leave. Tiglath

Pileser got loose and fell upon the jungle sheep. Fortunately the cub was too young to pull the deer down. It wrenched itself free, not without a wound or two, and escaped into the jungle. I shall never see it again."

Miss Madersfield generalized on the folly of bringing beasts together that had different tastes.

"The world is full of people with different tastes," said Nonia.

"They don't eat each other," replied Miss Madersfield, speaking more to the point than usual.

"Because they can't; they would like to do it sometimes—like my uncle," said Pensax.

He inquired into the cause of Houssain's absence, and heard the story of the quarrel between the Muhammadan and Hindu. He seemed interested and rather curious as to the exact reason. He counselled Nonia to send Houssain back to the west coast where he belonged.

"Those Moplah men are half savages, very vindictive if they take offence. You can't get rid of the Hindu, you say. Then the other fellow should go. I wish I could persuade you to dismiss him."

He spoke as some old friend might have spoken, whose word was an authority not to be disregarded.

"I'm sure that's what Colonel Tredmere would say if he could hear all the details," added Miss Madersfield.

Nonia's lips tightened, and she raised her chin slightly. It was sufficient to show Pensax that his advice would not be taken, and that his influence was gone. He was wise enough not to pursue the subject. Whether that influence might be revived was another question to be decided later.

When dinner was ended Pensax followed his companions into the drawing-room at Nonia's suggestion, and lighted his cigarette there. Miss Madersfield, according to her

custom, put her feet on the fender, and settled herself down on her cushions with the deliberate intention of stealing forty winks if the conversation allowed. Pensax had much to say to Nonia, which was of vital importance to himself. He was indifferent as to whether he was overheard by "Aunt Mary"—as he had more than once called her during dinner—or whether she lost herself in her forty winks.

"Come and sit over here, Nonia," said Dick, softly, after he had arranged the cushions to Miss Madersfield's liking. "Then the smoke from my cigarette won't annoy Aunt Mary. I remember that she was never quite reconciled to tobacco."

He moved towards a sofa that stood near the open French window.

"Will this be too much for you? Shall I shut it?"

"Oh no! I often sit here when I'm tired of reading. I love looking out into the Indian night. There is so much company in it."

"How can that be when everything is asleep?"

She was standing at the entrance leading into the verandah. He had seated himself and was watching her.

"You are wrong there, Dick; but you're not a worshipper of Nature; you are essentially a creature of the town, you always were."

She turned and looked at him, and he was well content to have the whole of her attention. He took the hand that hung listlessly by her side and drew her down on the sofa beside him.

"Sit down, dear; I've such a lot to say."

"Yes?" she said as he paused.

"Six months ago my wife died."

There was silence. Neither moved, except that Pensax occasionally blew a little cloud of smoke from his lips. A grasshopper whirred in the shelter of the passion-flower

as it sounded a metallic challenge to its neighbour. The flutter of a bat's leathern wing came softly on the air sweeping over the tuberose lilies where lurked the honey-eating moth.

"Did it happen in Africa?" she asked.

"You don't express any surprise," he remarked, without replying to her question. "I suppose my uncle told you?"

"He mentioned it in his last letter. He just stated the fact and nothing more. It is all I have heard of it."

"I thought he would probably tell you. Did he ask you to return to England?"

"He said he thought it might be best."

"Are you going to do so?"

"I think not. I am very happy here, and I see no necessity for uprooting. Colonel Tredmere is living in chambers in town, where he is comfortable. He doesn't want to make a change, although he very kindly says that he is quite ready to take a house and live in the country again if I will join him. It is very good of him."

After a pause Pensax threw away the end of his cigarette and said—

"You asked where Clara died. It was at the General Hospital, Madras, about six months ago. She came out to India with the intention of joining me. I was then prospecting round Ootacamund. On board ship her weakness overpowered her, and by the time she reached Madras she was such a wreck that the ship's doctor took her straight to the hospital. I went down at once and did what I could to make her comfortable; but she only survived three days. It was a merciful release."

"I suppose so."

"She asked my forgiveness before she died. She did me a great wrong."

He glanced at her. She had again turned away, and was gazing into the "thousand eyes of night."

"I'm glad that she realized the fact."

"And I did you a great wrong, Nonia; but I did it in ignorance."

The pathetic sadness that had crept into his voice touched her. She had been prepared for excuse and self-justification; but here was the very opposite. His self-depreciatory attitude disarmed her and opened the fount of her pity, ever ready to flow at the sight of trouble or pain.

"Poor Dick! I always knew that you were more sinned against than sinning, and I never blamed you as your uncle did."

"I believed that I was free when I made love to you; when you took my heart from me! Who could help loving you? You are the most lovable woman I ever had the fortune or misfortune to meet! I worshipped you!" he said in a low passionate voice that moved her strangely. "I love you still!"

"Hush! Dick! it is forbidden!" she exclaimed, half rising as though in protest.

He detained her and drew her down again.

"You mistake, Nonia! You don't realize that I am free! free! free to speak out what is burning in my heart; free to revel in the luxury of loving you without being false to any other woman in the world."

He bent forward, still retaining her hand, and looked into her eyes. "I have startled you. You have not yet grasped the altered conditions of our relationship. I must give you time. It will all come back; all that I was to you, all that you were and still are to me."

She did not answer, but with averted face looked out once more into the scented night of her flowers. He would

not hurry her. The victory was to be won by waiting, not by assaulting the citadel.

He rose with the wisdom of the man who knows woman as far as he is permitted to know, and walked to the piano on the other side of the room opposite the window in which she sat. He opened the instrument and in the dim light of fire and lamp ran his fingers softly over the keys. From where he sat he could see Nonia. With the first notes of the piano she withdrew her eyes from the darkened garden. Her head was bent and her fingers tightly locked together.

He began to sing, choosing an old song that she had often heard in the old days, when he was secure in the belief that his Cape-born wife was dead; and when Nonia had no thought of a cloud between herself and Colonel Tredmere's attractive nephew. As he ceased, Miss Madersfield, who had taken up her knitting, said—

"How nice to hear your voice again! Do give us another."

He broke into a gay rollicking tune that was a favourite with Nonia and which she used to beg for when she was in her happiest mood. She said it made her think of panpipes and satyrs dancing through the catkinned willows of a wood in early spring.

Still she gave no sign, and said not a word. Conventional thanks he did not want. Miss Madersfield could pour out sufficient gratitude if he asked for it. He watched for a responsive movement, no matter how slight; a glance that might reveal the awakening of the love that had been so cruelly killed.

His fingers wandered over the keys in soft harmonies that spoke a language of their own. Miss Madersfield, content with the soothing sounds, did not ask for another song. Her knitting had dropped upon her lap, and she

gave herself up to the luxury of dreaming, her eyes on the expiring flames, her thoughts turning back into the past.

Suddenly, as if compelled by an unseen power, he burst into the same passionate love song that Warborough had heard as he came back from Lutterworth's house to the hotel. Into it the singer poured his whole soul. Its appeal could not be mistaken. Even the staid Aunt Mary was carried back to scenes that she had imagined were dead and buried. A carpet of bluebells, a whistling blackbird, a voice that poured out that same passionate appeal thrilled her once more. She forgot her age and lived again with the world before instead of behind her, and with hope springing like the flowers of the wood in her heart.

A shiver passed over Nonia. It did not escape him. What was it? Fear lest she should again be beguiled by the seductive voice? Or was it the rebirth of love?

"Give me thy hands and draw me to thy heart; give me one look—then all my doubts depart! For I have seen the sympathy that lies, like tender flame within those dear soft eyes!"

The words died away and the refrain echoed on the notes of the piano under his inspired fingers. Nonia rose as though she would escape. She turned away from the singer, and again looked out into the night.

"Give me thy love," sang Pensax, "that I may live again; give me thy lips and kiss away my pain! For all my soul is pleading still for thee to give and give again thy sympathy! Ah! love! Give me thy sympathy!" *

As he ended his voice dropped from passionate demand to humble pleading in the last line; Nonia turned suddenly.

"Dick! Dick!" she cried breathlessly. "Ah! stop! It is all a mistake! You don't understand!"

He came to her swiftly. The logs had burned to glowing

* "Sympathy," by C. Hay.

ash, and no longer spirted tongues of flame. In the deepened shadows of the room she caught him by the arm and held him off.

"The past is dead, Dick, dead and gone! I have no heart to give. My pity is still there. Oh, Dick! I am so sorry! Poor lonely Dick! I'm so sorry! It is too late! too late!"

The knitter by the fire was still groping in her own dead past, too much absorbed to heed the tragedy of the younger generation.

He stood and looked at her with eyes that burned like the red embers on the hearth. Taking one of her hands he lifted it to his lips.

"Good night, beloved," he said simply.

Five minutes later the Dark'un was bearing him up the hill at a gallop, whilst the syce was plodding down to the hotel to await his master on his return from his night's ride.

CHAPTER XIX

It was the night of the ball. The greater part of the guests wore fancy costumes, and only a few had availed themselves of the liberty to come in ordinary evening dress. One of these was Warborough, and he had a companion in his remissness in Colonel Oswald, who, in spite of all his wife could urge, begged off "dressing up."

Maud Honington was resplendent as Queen of Diamonds. The necklace was a finishing touch which, as admiring Ivy said, "made the dress." Her eyes matched the diamonds, as she watched for the coming of the Knave of Hearts.

Pansy and Ivy were blossom laden, decked in soft silks and chiffon and the spoils of Nonia's garden. There was a little delay in beginning the programme, as a few minutes' grace was pleaded for to allow of a promenade round the room to display the dresses.

Berringham and Devon arrived together. The former was in a gorgeous Stuart dress that threw a glamour of distinction over him, and made him appear almost handsome, though his figure was inclined to be thick and his features commonplace. The costume was carried out in purple velvet and pale primrose satin, with the usual ruffles of lace. There was nothing of the garden flower about him, but the tone of his dress had an affinity with Pansy's flowers; and as he offered his arm to her for the promenade the harmony between the two was apparent.

Devon wore the dress of an English countryman, shirt,

and red tie, knee breeches, blue stockings, and a straw hat.

"Are you a haymaker, Captain Devon, if so where's your rake?" asked Ivy, as he approached.

"I'm the gardener, Miss Ivy, come to look after the flowers. Pansies must be protected from slugs, and roses and ivy need support and training. Let the gardener begin his duties at once, and take charge of the ivy disguised as the spirit of roses."

He offered her his arm, and they followed Berringham and Pansy.

"We've brought mother," remarked Ivy, with a distinct note of triumph in her voice. They were waiting for the line to complete its formation.

"Of course Mrs. Cotheridge would come; was there any doubt about it?"

"The doubt was about her dress. Mumsie wanted to wear her usual black; but we protested. We said she must come as a great-great. She said no! no!! NO!!! as she usually does before she says yes. I can fancy the old darling saying it to Dad when he proposed!"

Devon laughed, as he always did at Ivy's sallies.

"How did you overcome her scruples; by brute force?"

"Oh no! you don't use brute force with parents; but only with husbands. We began to make the dress with some of that soft Persian satin that you get in the Muhammadan shops. We chose old rose and pale green. Now look at her! Isn't she a triumph to rejoice the eyes of two hard-working, painstaking daughters? I'll bet you a cigarette to a box of chocolates—you paying the chocolates of course——"

"Of course!"

"—— that Major Berringham—isn't he simply splendid in that dress?—asks her for a dance."

"I'll see that he does!" said Devon, warmly.

"And you must introduce me to the Knave of Hearts. He hasn't called, you know. Isn't he magnificent?"

"You're half in love with him already," he said.

"Oh! more than half!" she replied, with frank enthusiasm. "He has carried it out so well; yellow wig, battle axe and leaf complete."

Nonia and Miss Madersfield were a little late in arriving. Aunt Mary had been more tractable than Mrs. Cotheridge, and had adopted an early Victorian style which suited her admirably. When it came to the finishing touches in dressing, she had shown so much anxiety over detail that they had been delayed.

For her own dress Nonia stuck to her original idea of a nurse's uniform, the chief feature being a large muslin cap and white apron. The apron was furnished with a deep pocket. A spirit of mischief had suggested that Ricki, the mongoose, might repose at the bottom of it. She called herself "The jungle folk's friend." As she passed close to Berringham she took the furry creature out and presented it to him. He started back in real horror, and Ivy, who saw the little incident, was overcome with laughter.

"So sorry!" said Nonia. "I thought you would be so pleased to see dear little Ricki again. You know you were responsible for my buying him."

"Indeed, Miss Armscote, I had nothing to do with it," he protested; and turning to Pansy he poured into her willing and sympathetic ear the whole story of their encounter with the Afghan on the Ooty road, and a great deal more besides. He was beginning to think that a merciful Providence had interfered on his behalf to prevent him from carrying out his intention of proposing to Nonia that day.

"Miss Armscote!" said Lutterworth, as he hurried in at that moment a little late. "Will you be my partner for this trotting-out business? It's rather an ordeal, don't you think?"

He was in the embroidered velvet coat and muslin turban of a Muhammadan. She put her hand on his arm, and they took their places in the procession. There was a great crowd, too great a number to promise much space for dancing; but it was a pretty show. The band played a march, and the company, laughing and chaffing in the best of humours, moved round the room. As usual in an Indian up-country station, the guests were more or less acquainted with each other. The greatest stranger was perhaps Pensax; but his circumstances were known by this time.

"How well you've carried out that dress, Miss Honington!" he said in Maud's ear.

"I'm so glad you like it," she replied, in the same confidential tone.

"Those are Miss Armscote's diamonds, aren't they?"

"Yes; it was so kind of her to lend them to me."

"I remember them of old. They are very fine stones, and there's a strange story connected with them. I wonder you're not nervous about having them in your possession."

"I should be if Miss Armscote hadn't given me a piece of advice. She told me to wear them always, under my frock of course. She does it. You've no idea how it relieves one's mind of anxiety to be able to know the stones are safe. The reason she took to wearing them was because Miss Madersfield didn't like being left with them in the house when Nonia was out riding or walking. Do tell me the story. There will be time for it while we march round."

"The stones belonged to her mother, who was born in India. Miss Armscote's grandfather was Resident at the

court of a Rajah; and the Rajah became very much attached to him. When the daughter of the Resident was a year old the Rajah was anxious to make her a birthday present. He asked that the child might be sent up to the palace with her ayah. He so contrived that a diamond should be placed in the way of the child; who, attracted by the glitter, picked it up and stuck tightly to it till she got back to her mother. Of course the parents thought that the diamond had been given to the little girl. On her second birthday the same thing happened. Every year for seven years Nonia's mother returned home from her birthday visit with a magnificent diamond. Then came illness; and the doctor ordered mother and child home. The Rajah asked to be allowed to have the diamonds set as a necklace. He said that they were known as the seven Rishis, the seven Hindu sages who taught the gods, and were afterwards turned into the Pleiades."

"What a pretty idea!" commented Maud. "Turning the wise men into stars, I mean; so that they could go on shining without having to keep school any more."

"The Rajah had other stones added, and when the necklace was completed he handed it to Nonia's grandfather, telling him that his little daughter had stolen the seven Rishis. He explained that it was the only means by which the diamonds could pass from one owner to another without ill luck going with them. A curse had been laid upon them by an ancestress who was jealous because they were given to a younger and more favoured wife. The gift of them was to carry misfortune, and the curse could only be evaded by theft when they changed hands. In this way, you see, they could never again be safely bestowed by a lover on the woman of his choice."

"I suppose it was all right for Nonia to receive them from her mother by inheritance?"

"They came to her before her mother died. Nonia stole them; I think, greatly to her mother's relief. One day when Mrs. Armscote was out, Nonia was seized with an impish freak to wear the jewels with a new frock she had just put on. She was about twelve years old when it happened. I heard the story from Nonia herself. She said she went up to her mother's room to look at herself in the glass. Seeing the keys on the dressing-table, she opened the jewel case and took out the necklace. On the return of her mother she met her in the hall, the diamonds round her neck; and she danced with delight. Her mother looked shocked. Probably, being rather superstitious, she was thinking about that ridiculous old curse. Anyway the child was frightened. She unclasped the necklace and would have given it back at once; but Mrs. Armscote was horrified at the thought of it. The child had stolen the diamonds and worn them. They would have been restored as a gift with the curse upon them. So Nonia kept them from that time. Of course it's all nonsense about the bad luck, but it makes a good story."

"And a most interesting one. I wish some one would throw diamonds in my path to pick up!"

"Try your hand at stealing those that you are wearing. I won't tell any tales, I promise you! Ah! there's a waltz. You're going to give this to me," he said, as he slipped an arm round her, and guided her into the crowd of circling couples.

Lutterworth had begged for the dance. Before Nonia could commence it was necessary to dispose of Ricki. He was consigned to his basket, which was in charge of one of the rickshaw men just outside the door. As she was effecting the transfer from her apron pocket Warborough came up.

"You have a dance for me, I hope, Miss Armscote?"

he said, with his aloof manner, that gave her the impression that his hope was not very keen.

"I really don't know if I have any left." She looked at her card carelessly. "Oh yes! I'm not engaged for all. Choose which you like."

She handed him her programme and turned her attention to her pet, giving the man directions to place the basket in the pony-carriage and not in the rickshaw; Miss Madersfield would be annoyed to find it there. Warborough put his name against a dance that was rather low down on the programme. She glanced at it and was conscious of a slight feeling of disappointment.

"I may not remain to the end," she said. "Miss Madersfield doesn't wish to stay late."

"I hope I shall not lose my dance," he said, making no attempt to alter the engagement to an earlier one.

She shot a swift glance at him under her eyelashes, wondering what had caused the shadow of coldness she felt rather than saw. It was like the greyness that enveloped the mountains after the warm glow of sunset. The expression on his face told her nothing; but there was a certain reserve in his eyes, as he let them rest upon her for a short space, that roused in her a vague sense of uneasiness.

Lutterworth was anxious to begin; it was the first dance on the programme, and as he had to turn in early, because of an appointment next morning, he had no intention of losing any portion of the fun. She was whirled away the moment her programme was restored. Fortunately her partner was more intent on dancing than on talking; and she had time to collect her thoughts and ask herself why she should resent a coldness of manner in Warborough. He could be nothing to her but an acquaintance, or at most a friend. Reasons existed that made it

advisable for her to avoid the formation of any stronger tie than friendship for the present. She ought to have welcomed the change instead of allowing it to plunge her into depression.

As she made the circle of the room her eyes unconsciously sought that black figure conspicuous by the contrast it formed with the bright colours of the fancy dresses. It was not often that she recognized it, for he did not dance much. Only once did his eyes meet hers; as a rule he seemed to be studiously avoiding her glance.

She saw him dancing with some girls who were staying at the Glenview Hotel. Nonia was dancing with the Knave of Hearts. It was the second waltz she had given Pensax, and he was leaning over her, speaking in a low voice, his whole soul thrown into his words. She could but listen, although she would fain have run away. As she stood at the end of the ballroom resting for a few seconds, she lifted her eyes from the fan she held and met Warborough's steady gaze. So fixed was it that he could not immediately withdraw it, and she had opportunity to read what was in it. As plainly as if he spoke the words, his eyes asked the question—

"What are you to Pensax, and what is he to you?"

She had been telling Pensax that she had heard him ride up the hill after he left her house on the evening when he dined with her.

"Where did you go?" she asked.

"For a gallop up into the mountains. I felt that I must have a breath of hill air after your last words to me. They were like a death-dealing knife; they pierced my very soul."

She had nothing to say, although the impulse seized her to repeat them, and to add that they were final. It would have hurt him unnecessarily, and she felt that he

had been sufficiently hurt. In time he would understand that his cause was hopeless, and that there could be no renewal of love between them for the simple reason that her love was dead.

"Nonia, it isn't too late. I can be patient if you want time to think it over. No! I can't! I can't wait!" he said, breaking into hot, eager speech. "I want you now! now! I'm sick to death of this prospecting business. Come to England, and we will be married——"

It was just at this point that she caught Warborough's eyes fixed upon her with the unspoken question. He could not have heard what Pensax was saying; but something in Pensax's manner suggested that the words he used were not the ordinary inconsequent speech of the ballroom.

"Stop, Dick! this won't do," she said, with the faintest touch of irritation in her voice. "I told you the other evening that the time was past, and that it could never come again."

"You did love me once," he said, in low-toned vehemence.

"Was it love?" she asked. "I doubt it!"

Warborough had his back to her now, as he steered his partner to the other side of the room.

"Of course it was! Have you forgotten?"

"I have forgotten nothing! nothing!" she said.

"If that is the case you love me still!" he answered, a ring of triumph in his voice. "We will go to England, and you will have pity on the poor wanderer, and let him find peace and rest under your wing. Am I less to you than those creatures you cherish; that senseless bear? and ungrateful panther cub? Yet I need your love and pity a thousand times more than they do. I could kill them all for the priceless treasure they receive without the

asking. 'Darling! Give me thy heart again! thy pity! thy love!' " he concluded in the words of his song.

He drew her into the dance, and she felt his arms about her with a possessive touch that he had no right to exercise. Again the irritation rose. He was exceeding the limit of good taste in continuing his pleading. She was conscious of having maintained a firm unyielding front. Not by look or sign or word had she shown herself undecided. He ought to accept her decision as final; for final she determined to make it. The music stopped, and she broke away from him at once, not waiting to take his arm. Walking round the room, she went straight up to Miss Madersfield and took a vacant seat next to hers. He followed, just a little bit disconcerted.

"Thank you, Dick," she said curtly.

"Won't you give me another?" he asked.

"No; no more this evening. You've had two." Then, turning to Miss Madersfield, she said, "Are you tired, Auntie? Do you want to go home before supper? I'm ready if you would like to go."

Dick understood that he was dismissed. For a few seconds he waited. Then, seeing Maud, he walked off without another word. His was not a nature to sulk and gloom when things did not run quite as smoothly as he could wish. Where the best was unattainable there was always a second best to console the disappointed heart. It was a relief to Nonia to see the ready smile on his lips as he bent over the happy Queen of Diamonds, and whispered something in her ear that brought the light into her eyes.

"I'm in no hurry; I think I should like to stay till after supper. It is really very amusing to watch all these characters pairing off without any regard to their affinities. The Queen of Diamonds has been dancing with a robber chief; and the Knave of Hearts with a quakeress."

"He has his affinity back again now. He and Maud make a delightful pair," said Nonia.

"So do Pansy and Major Berringham. Dear me! there he is, dancing with her mother! I'm sure he is attracted to the daughter."

"And why not? Pansy is a dear, and he's not a bad old thing himself."

Miss Madersfield turned to a lady sitting on the other side and continued her running commentary on the various characters. Nonia did not join in. Her mind wandered, and she did not even hear what was being said. A sense of dreariness had settled down upon her, and she was filled with a vague regret that she had given Dick the second dance. He had taken an unfair advantage of her kindness and used it as an occasion for renewing his prayer for something she had no intention of granting. She was also troubled by the conviction that his manner had compromised her in the eyes of those who took the trouble to observe. Although he had been careful that his actual words were not overheard, there was something in his attitude that betrayed his emotion. A man could not plead his love without showing that the subject of his speech was more than the commonplace chatter of society. As she considered the incident she was more and more convinced that Warborough had interpreted correctly; that he knew of Dick's request. What reply she had given he could not so well divine, unless he had heard and seen Dick's dismissal; but at the time she joined Miss Madersfield he was not in the room.

A sudden desire seized her to explain everything to Warborough; to answer the question she had surprised in his eyes. She knew his reserved nature, and her heart sank. He would never ask her how matters stood between herself and any other man. It was even possible that he

would never even give her the opportunity of making any explanation, however willing she might be to offer it.

And after all, what could she say? To offer it would place her in the intolerable position of a suppliant for his interest, his regard; he might, if he had sufficient vanity, look upon her as a candidate for his love! The hot blood rushed to her cheeks as she thought of it, and as it retreated it left her unusually pale.

She looked at her card. There were still two dances before Warborough would claim her; Colonel Oswald came next, and then Devon. Thinking it likely that Miss Madersfield, after her expressed desire to leave early, would not stay later than supper, perhaps not so long, she had not engaged herself for any of the after-supper dances. In her present mood she would have been quite ready to go home at once.

As she went off with Colonel Oswald she again caught sight of Dick. He was leaning over Maud with an undisguised expression of devotion. He might from his manner have been pleading the selfsame cause with her and laying his heart at her feet, as he had laid it at Nonia's. How could she, Nonia, ever have been caught? The Dick of her girlish dreams was not the Dick of to-day.

She could not help smiling as she moved with her partner round the room. A turn brought her close to Warborough. He too was watching the Knave of Hearts; and there was a puzzled look on his face as his eyes met Nonia's with that smile in them. She was laughing at the man who had held her hand in his on the lawn and had bent over her in the ballroom, as though he waited for the word that was to make or mar his happiness for life! Somehow that chance encounter of eyes lifted the cloud that oppressed her, and let in a tiny ray of light; but it upset all Warborough's calculations and set him wondering.

It was not until the first bars of the music sounded that he came to claim her. She had fulfilled her engagement with Devon, and he had gone to find his next partner. As she sat alone for that single minute and heard the opening notes of the dance, she prepared herself for Warborough's failure to keep faith with her; but he was not faithless. He was there, silent, courteous, unemotional, creating that curious impression of aloofness which made her feel as if she wanted to break loose from him and from herself. She was conscious of a frantic desire to beat down the barriers that his manner set up; to demand an explanation and to give one herself. In justice she had a right to be judged fairly. He could not judge her until he had listened to what she could urge in justification. Impelled to speak, she was struck dumb by his constrained bearing, which was like a wall of ice.

They moved into the stream of couples, not quite so thick as at the beginning of the ball. They both danced well; and at former dances he had always asked for at least two. With the first step she took she was acutely conscious that whatever their temperaments might be, their dancing was in harmony. Yet for all that, she stopped before they had completed the round of the room. It was impossible to go on. She could not bear the touch of his arm; it set her nerves tingling.

CHAPTER XX

"Do you mind if we stop? I'm sorry. I'm afraid I can't dance any more to-night. Perhaps you would like to get another partner."

She spoke breathlessly, and he heard the fatigue in her voice; but he said nothing. She found her hand on his arm—how it came there she could not have told—and he was leading her to a seat among ferns and foliage plants in the verandah.

"Your partners have tired you out," he said, as he pulled a cushion up behind her to make the seat more restful. "Lean back; we will sit this dance out. I shall be glad not to dance it."

"You are sure you don't mind?" she said, with a little sigh of content.

"No." He was silent; a sense of peace fell over them which could be best enjoyed without words.

The music came on the night air in subdued tones, and they could hear the soft hum of gliding feet over the boarded floor. They were alone in the verandah; the rest of the world was still intent on the dance.

Suddenly, as though obeying an impulse he could not resist, he leaned over her as she lay back in the corner of the couch and put his lips to hers. She offered no resistance. It was as food to a starving soul that did not know the extent of its hunger until the means of satisfying it were at hand. The sense of time was lost for both till

the cessation of the music reminded them that the dance was ended, and that the couples would troop out as usual to cool themselves, and snatch a few minutes' rest in the "boskies." Warborough drew away, and Nonia made an effort to rise. He gently restrained her.

"Sit still, dear one. I have something to say. Probably you have something to tell me."

He took one of her hands, and the firm clasp stilled her. Then he released it and leaned back in his own corner. They might have been a couple of exhausted dancers.

"Now I want you to tell me what Pensax is to you, and what he was in that past of which I know nothing. As I went by your gate the other day I saw him with you. He held your hand as I held it just now. May I know by what right he did so?"

"He had no right but the right of sufferance; as an old friend for whom I had pity."

There was silence. Two people, Berringham and Pansy, strolled by. He waited till they had gone; but he need not have done so; Pansy and her partner were too much absorbed in each other to have eyes for any one but themselves.

"The story, please, from the beginning," he demanded in a tone of quiet authority. She remained silent, not knowing how to begin, and filled with a secret dread lest the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as the children say in their games, should shatter the rosy dream of bliss that had so suddenly dawned upon her. As she did not speak, he said, "First tell me, Pensax is Colonel Tredmere's nephew?"

"Yes, and I am Colonel Tredmere's ward, or was, I should say, as I have been my own mistress since I came of age."

"And you met Pensax in Colonel Tredmere's house?"

"On his return from Africa."

"Was he in the army on active service?"

"No; he failed for Sandhurst and took to mining. He went out to Africa to some appointment connected with a mine. He was mxied up in a mysterious business which made Colonel Tredmere very angry. I don't know what it was. He returned from Africa out of health and very depressed. Sometimes I fancied that he got into disgrace with the authorities; but if that was the case he kept his secret."

"What was Colonel Tredmere's opinion?"

"I never mentioned the subject to him. I still feel a little bit ashamed of myself for having doubted Dick's conduct. I am sure that it was an error of judgment and not absolute wrongdoing. Whatever it was, it seemed to be the cause of his depression. I was sorry for him, and I helped Aunt Mary, who was keeping house for Colonel Tredmere in those days, to nurse Dick back to health. And then——"

"Exactly so!" he said as she paused. "You fell in love with him."

"Yes," she admitted faintly, adding, "or thought I did."

"I know all about that sort of thing. I've been through it myself. The girl very kindly cured me by chucking me and marrying another fellow who was better off than I was. Did you dismiss Pensax, or did he throw you over?"

"Neither."

The music had begun again. It was the last dance before supper. They were alone once more, and when the dance was ended the company would troop down into the supper-room.

"Then you are still engaged to Pensax," he said, in some surprise.

"No! no!—and yet——"

He had to take a firm grip of himself to preserve an outward calm. Inwardly he burned with a deadly curiosity of which he was ashamed, because it was prompted by a nameless dread of some entanglement by which she was still bound to Pensax.

Again he leaned forward, his fingers closing over her hand, his eyes upon hers in the dimness of the half-lighted verandah.

"What happened? Tell me!" he said, in a low, tense voice.

"We were engaged and then—*we married.*"

Slowly his hold relaxed; still more slowly he drew himself away from her till he seemed to be looking at her across an immense gulf.

"You are his wife! Good Lord, forgive me!"

He was about to rise, intending to leave her. He felt stunned; he wanted to get away and grapple with her amazing statement by himself.

The thought of his departure before he had heard the whole of her confession roused her into desperate action. She caught him by the hand and pulled him down upon the seat again by sheer force.

"Listen! Oh! give me time to tell my story! Though I married him I am not his wife! As we came home together from the church, a woman met us at the door of Colonel Tredmere's house. She claimed Dick as her husband, and he did not deny the claim. All he said was, 'I thought you were dead, Clara; I thought you were dead!' Then she explained that she had had a forged certificate of her death sent to him. She did not wish to leave Africa, where she had met and married him. Her mother, a creole, was alive, and could not bear the thought of parting with her daughter, so together they managed to trick him into the

belief that his wife was dead. Then her mother died, and she wished to join him, so she came to England, and was just in time to save me from a terrible catastrophe. The thought of it still makes me hot and cold as I realize what might have been my fate if she had come a month later."

Again his hand sought hers, and the touch comforted her.

"You poor child! You've suffered!" After a pause Warborough said, "If Pensax is a married man, how is it that he has renewed his—friendship with you?"

"His wife died six months ago. She drank, poor thing! and was not accountable for her actions."

She told him the story Dick had related of his wife's arrival in Madras and her death in the General Hospital.

"All this happened to me a little more than two years ago. Colonel Tredmere was dreadfully distressed. He blamed Dick and was very angry; but what good could that do? I tried to make peace between them, but the Colonel fretted over the disgrace of it all. That was how he looked at it. I was his ward, committed to his care by a dead friend; and I had been cruelly wronged by a man who was nearly related to him. He gave up the house as soon as he could and brought me out here, where he hoped I should be out of Dick's way and might forget the trouble. He thought I should find new interests—bears and panther cubs, for instance," she said with a sad little smile, "and it has been successful so far."

"Have you had your marriage annulled?"

"No; I've done nothing. We came away at once without waiting for anything except just to pack up. I don't know what became of Dick. We left him with his wife to get on as he could. I know that he was very short of money. Colonel Tredmere was far too angry to allow him anything. Then suddenly we heard of Dick being in

India. As long as he was at Poona or Bangalore Colonel Tredmere didn't worry about it; but since Dick has been at Coonoor the Colonel has asked me to go home, promising to take another house in any part of the country that I choose. It is very good of him."

"Have you accepted his offer?"

"No; I refused." She looked at him, and there was a hunted expression in her eyes like some animal at bay.

"Why did you refuse?"

"Because—because——" She hesitated. How could she tell him that he himself was the unacknowledged attraction that bound her to Coonoor? "Oh! why should I be driven from pillar to post because Dick chooses to live in India? He is nothing to me. It took a very short time to cure me of my unfortunate infatuation; and I thank Heaven every day of my life for my escape. It was providential. I have told Dick that he is nothing to me and that the romance of the past is utterly dead."

"Then he has asked you again?"

"Oh yes! more than once. It is always the same," she replied wearily. "He did me a great wrong, but it might have been worse. I forgave him. I even pitied him when I knew the kind of woman she was; but as for love! If ever it existed it was killed long ago."

The music died away, and the dancers sought the supper-room. The stillness of the night enveloped them as they sat there. Beyond the Droog in the south a cloud hung over the Bowani valley. Occasionally a flash of lightning sent a flicker of light into the steely sky.

Nonia was silent. She sat in the corner of the couch without movement. She had made her confession and was bowing her head to the storm which must break. How could he or any other man but Pensax himself face such an extraordinary position? She was a wife and yet no wife;

she was tied and yet she might be free if certain formalities were observed. Warborough rose from his seat.

"Come! you must have something to eat."

His voice was kind, but promised nothing. She glanced at him with a new timidity.

"You go and let me stay here. I want to rest a few minutes before I face that crowd."

For answer he took her by the arm and drew her up towards him. She felt the grasp that was almost a grip; and again the sense of his strength and power to shelter and to protect overcame her. Suddenly she lifted her arms and threw them round his neck.

"Oh, help me! Don't leave me!" she cried passionately, as she clung to him as a frightened child might cling.

* * * * *

The supper was more than half over when they entered the room. Pensax was sitting at a table near the entrance, with Maud by his side. He had missed Nonia and Warborough from the ballroom during the last two dances, and his eye was quick to note their belated appearance. Nonia looked tired, as indeed she was, but not unhappy. Warborough was if anything more impassive than ever. Yet for all that Dick divined the truth. He knew now why she had cried, Too late! The time was past, and his chance of success gone for ever. The song he had sung to her that evening was the song of the swan, the dirge of death to all his hopes, not a song of renewed joy and life. His heart sank within him, but he showed nothing of the blow that he had received. He laughed and said things to Maud that were a strange medley of compliment, devotion, and fun; and she looked at him puzzled to understand his mood. He often answered at random without comprehending her replies.

The couple passed on in search of a table. There were

places for two in one of the recesses. Devon and Ivy were there, and they made room for them.

"Just two places for you here! Sit down, both of you," said Devon. "I doubt if there's anything left to eat. We've been like a plague of locusts in the land; we were all so hungry. I'll see what I can find."

Of course there was plenty; but Nonia took very little. It was Devon, and not Warborough, who attended to her needs, while Ivy directed her tiny darts of chaff against Warborough.

"You didn't turn up at the night march picnic, Captain Warborough. You missed a good deal. We had such fun."

"I wasn't invited, for one thing; for another I had had a long day's outing, and could not have gone if I had had an invitation."

"Tiger shooting or snapshotting or buffalo catching or ghost hunting, or what?" asked Ivy, looking up at him with undisguised curiosity and speaking slowly.

"Oh! er—none of those things."

"You'll tell me when you find it, won't you?"

"What?" he asked, almost ruffled out of his usual imperturbability.

"The missing link. Do you know, I have an idea that I can help you."

"Indeed!" he replied, wondering what she was aiming at and not quite realizing that she was poking fun at him.

"Yes," she said, nodding her head wisely and reaching out her hand for an orange. She peeled it with a knife, and taking the long spiral of rind, threw it over his head so that it fell on the floor just at the back of his chair.

"What are you doing, Miss Ivy?" said Devon, who had just returned from a second foraging expedition for the benefit of Nonia and Warborough.

"Practising the black art on behalf of Captain Warborough. Let me see! Don't move; I have to read the sign as it points to you. It is not N; then you're not looking for Nonia. It's not B, buffaloes. Nor G, ghost; nor T, tiger; nor S, snap-shots. No! it's undoubtedly a P, a very florid scriggly P. Pansy or Pensax are the only two P's I can think of. It can't be Pansy! It must be Mr. Pensax. Let me warn you to be careful. He is a knave, as you can see for yourself; and not to be trusted with either tarts or hearts; a person to beware of——"

The sound of the band recommencing scattered the oracle to the winds. Devon got up. "Our dance, Miss Ivy," and away they went, anxious to lose nothing of the seductive waltz.

There was a general move to the ballroom, and Warborough found himself once more practically alone with Nonia.

"You've eaten nothing," he said, as she put down her knife and fork, the food scarcely touched.

"I think Aunt Mary will be ready to go home. No; really, I don't want anything more," she said as he pressed her to have something else.

"One minute; I want Colonel Tredmere's address. The mail goes out to-morrow."

"You are going to write to him?" she asked as she gave it.

"At once; this very night. I shall not rest till it is done. The marriage of Pensax to the woman you call Clara must be proved and your own annulled before you are free to marry again. I can't help wondering why Colonel Tredmere has not taken action in the matter?"

"He said that it would be difficult to prove Dick's marriage, even though Clara brought the certificate with her. She was a widow when she married Dick; Colonel

Tredmere questioned her about her first husband, and discovered that she had no proof of his death. She thought he was dead because she hadn't heard from him for five years. Dick couldn't or wouldn't give him any help."

"Good heavens! what a muddle! This makes things ten times worse than I thought. It's a very serious matter."

"Is it? We know that Dick married at Johannesburg. Colonel Tredmere took possession of the certificate. Dick himself was quite ready to admit it. He told Colonel Tredmere that as far as he knew Clara was his wife. Of course he is not married to me if his first wife was living at the time of our marriage, as we know she was. How can it be a serious matter?"

"Supposing that his wife's first husband was alive when she married Pensax, then Pensax's marriage with her was no marriage. In that case——"

He paused and looked at her; for once the impassive face showed signs of being moved. A troubled anxiety was in his eyes as he faced the tragedy.

"Yes?" she said breathlessly.

"In that case you are his wife."

They said it was fatigue that made her faint. She had danced too much. When she had sufficiently recovered Warborough put her into her pony-carriage and drove her back to Chamra House himself. Miss Madersfield followed in her rickshaw.

At the door he lifted her down; she turned her face to his, but he released her without availing himself of the opportunity.

"Take courage, best beloved. As soon as I can get away home I shall go and see Colonel Tredmere. This business must be cleared up with as little delay as possible."

"How good you are!" she cried.

He drew away into the starry night, his eyes still on her. She raised her arms and held them out towards him, then dropped them to her side. He understood; it was an involuntary appeal to his protective love. The pathetic figure with drooping head stirred him strongly; but he resisted the great temptation. The thought that she might be the wife of another man held him back and kept her sacred from his touch.

CHAPTER XXI

The racecourse at Wellington was looking its best under a brilliant sun. There had been heavy rain in the early morning, with ragged clouds trailing over Dodabetta and hanging about Teneriffe ; but the mists had cleared, leaving the sky an intense azure blue that promised more showers later on. The hills were streaked with the silver threads of mountain streams ; and the rivulet, running through the valley dividing Wellington from Coonoor, was presumptuously noisy as its swollen waters rushed down the narrow channel.

The level bit of turf which was Wellington's pride was of a soft emerald green that would doubtless have delighted the eye of an artist. It did not appeal to the man who made riding the business of the day ; for it meant a slippery course, more particularly at the "corner," which was frequently qualified by the word "nasty."

Carriages and motors streamed down both sides of the hill as they brought visitors from Wellington and Coonoor. The company gathered at the entrance of the enclosure of the grand stand, greeting each other here and there, and strolling at their leisure to the seats. It was a favourable day for fine feathers, and the scene was gay with colour and merry with laughter.

"How lucky we are to have it so fine!" said Mrs. Cotheridge, as she and her daughters encountered a group of men on the steps of the stand.

"It will be splendid going for the horses; the air is so cool," said Ivy, addressing her remark to one of the young officers from Wellington.

"I'm not so sure of that," he replied, drawing nearer. "The men who are riding say that the heavy rain this morning will have made the corner rather slippery."

Ivy's eyes were everywhere, and she was not interested in the course itself as a course. The affair to her was a show.

"Look at the natives sitting up there like rows of kharki-coloured sparrows!"

Her glance was directed towards groups of Budagas squatting in lines on the hillsides in the sun. Their drab sheets were draped like shawls over their spare brown bodies; and their heads were bound in small neat turbans formed of a white or red cotton handkerchief, an article of clothing only brought out on gala occasions. They did not understand the art of racing, and were not acquainted with the riders or the owners. They knew nothing about horses of any kind, and rarely saw one unless it was a wretched tonga pony on the ghat road. What they looked for was a fall of horse or rider. A tumble over the hurdles evoked shouts of laughter. A man and horse down together in a flat race was regarded seriously and greeted with murmurs of concern.

"I can't imagine what they find in the racing to interest them," he replied. "They don't bet, and they don't know one horse from another."

"How different they look in their dull clothing from the soldiers!" remarked Maud, who had joined Mrs. Cotheridge's party on the stand.

Her eyes were not upon the red-coats. She was watching for the coming of the horses and their jockeys. Among them would be Pensax, who was riding in the first race.

Ivy's attention was not preoccupied, and she turned to her companion with enthusiasm.

"The soldiers look splendid! Do tell me, Mr. Bewley, how you manage to keep your men so clean and fresh?"

"We have them 'marlished' every morning by the syces," he replied.

"I thought so! They're like freshly opened geraniums, not a speck nor a spot to be seen. Do tell them next time you superintend the grooming what dears they look in their lovely scarlet and give them a word or two of praise. It's so encouraging when you're trying to do your best. You needn't mention my name, but you might hint that a lady——"

"Oh, lor!" exclaimed the defeated man, who could not help grinning at the thought of the figure he would cut on parade. "I say, Miss Ivy, wouldn't you like to put something on this race at the totalisator? I'll take you to it and buy the ticket for you."

The trail across the scent was successful, and Ivy went off to gamble under her companion's escort.

"Are there any horses with names beginning with I?" she asked.

He referred to his card. "Yes; there's Idonia in the 'Planters' Stakes'; and there's Indiana in the 'Pony Hurdles'; and the Image in the 'Coonoor Stakes.' I don't advise you to back any one of those three. Orange is a favourite for the 'Planters'' and the Dark'un for the 'Hack Stakes.' You might do well if you backed the Nut for the 'Service Plate,' or the Flapper. She belongs to Pensax."

He took her and her gambling seriously. Knowing the girl of the day fairly well, he was prepared for a plunge; and as she had placed herself in his hands he was naturally anxious that she should not lose. But Ivy

had an individuality of her own and marked out a line for herself.

"Mr. Pensax's horse? Oh no! There are lots of people going to bet on him, I know. Why should he be greedy?" Her companion looked mystified, as well he might, at her allusion to greediness. "I shall bet on the poor 'rank outsiders,' as you call them, to encourage them and give them a little heart—at least all those," she amended, "whose names begin like mine, with an I. Please buy me tickets on Idonia, Indiana, and—what did you say was the name of the other?"

"The Image; he belongs to Major Berringham."

"Oh yes! And find out for me what the colours are."

Again he referred to his card. "Idonia's rider is wearing pink."

"Good! there's an I in that," said Ivy, nodding her head wisely.

"Indiana is ivory and black."

"Good again; I in ivory; and you can make Ivy out of it by leaving out the 'or.' Now tell me about the Image. What's his colour?"

"It's violet."

"Very good! Two of my letters, I and V. I'm in luck. Whose's riding the Image?"

"Captain Devon; but he has very little chance; and there's no I in his name."

"There's I in captain and V in Devon. Three tickets, please, on the Image."

Nonia was sitting near Miss Madersfield. She was silent and not altogether at her ease. The one person she fain would have spoken to held aloof; and the one she would have preferred to keep at a distance sought her out at the first opportunity. The first race was over, and Dick

approached, gay and laughing, as if life were a good joke with special prizes in it for himself, although he had not happened to carry off the victory in the race he had just been riding.

"I thought you were up," she said.

"So I was; but the race is over, and the second one as well. I'm afraid you're not paying much attention to the business of the day."

"Which is your next?"

"The 'Service Plate'; but it doesn't come off till after lunch. I'm riding for Major Berringham. Don't put your money on me."

"I'm not backing any horses," she replied.

"Not even the Dark'un?"

He leaned with his hands on the back of the bench upon which she sat and bent forward, his eyes upon her with an amused smile.

"Do put something on the Dark'un. I'm fond of the horse. It won't commit you to anything. Just for old sake's sake, dear!"

It was the same insinuating voice, and memory awoke again as she listened. She would have liked to have got up and walked boldly away; but she was hedged in by chattering people. Even Miss Madersfield had found a willing ear into which she could pour her unfinished remarks. As Nonia did not reply, he continued speaking in the manner of a man who has the attention of the woman he holds dearest in the world.

"Do you remember my uncle taking us to Ascot? It was the morning after we were engaged." He paused as an epicure might linger over the tasting of good wine. "You wore wonderful draperies of pale blue and sunlight gold. I said you reminded me of the blue hills at dawn. Don't look so unhappy, Nonia. Do be a little kind and let

a poor fellow, deprived of all pleasure in the present, revel in the past. What a glorious past it was until it was shattered by that bolt from the blue!"

Nonia stirred restlessly and glanced at him with a deprecating look. It was bad enough to have those kind of things said to her in private, but here on the public ground she felt that it compromised her. A tiny spark of resentment fired her speech.

"Don't, Dick; don't rake up the past. I won't have it. You may go and buy me a ticket at the totalisator for the Dark'un. I hope it may bring good luck."

He smiled good-naturedly at her device for getting rid of him.

"I can't buy the ticket just yet. I won't forget it when the time comes."

"What are your colours?"

"Black; suitable to a man of my misfortunes; don't you think so? Or is your pity entirely monopolised by those brutes you harbour in your happy family?"

Maud had noted his appearance on the stand, and was hoping that he would find his way to that part of it where she sat with her mother and some Coonoor friends. She was not of a patient disposition; seeing him absorbed in Nonia, she rose and gradually made her way towards the two. Before Nonia could again reprove Dick for his speech, Maud's voice broke in upon their conversation, to Nonia's relief and Pensax's annoyance. The annoyance, however, quickly passed as Maud spoke.

"I'm so sorry you had no luck in that first race, Mr. Pensax. I am afraid you were disappointed."

He turned at once, transferring his smile and attention with ready gratitude for her sympathy.

"I hadn't a chance from the very beginning, so I can't say I was surprised at the result. I hope you weren't

rash enough to back me. I'm not lucky as a rule, and lately I've been unlucky."

"I'm sorry," she said softly, letting her eyes rest on his with a warm light in them which a man of his experience could interpret easily. "I put a little money on, but I'm saving my real plunge for the Dark'un."

She shot a glance at Nonia, as the thought was suddenly suggested that the real Dark'un was not the horse, but the girl who sat there, indifferent and unmoved, though she must have known that she held this man to her side without an effort. A swift thrust of jealousy like the sharp point of a needle scored Maud's heart. The jealousy welled up into her eyes, and he saw it. It drew him to her; and turning away so that Nonia should not hear, he said in a low voice—

"I will do my best to win back what you have lost; otherwise I shall have to make it good to you in some other way. I see you are wearing my colours."

His eyes rested approvingly on a tiny ornament made of black satin violets and silk foliage.

"I wrote to Calcutta for it; I'm glad you like it."

Miss Madersfield suddenly broke off in her conversation with her friend to ask Nonia a question.

"Mrs. Ravenscourt wants to know if the ghost has been seen again. Can you tell her anything about it?"

As Nonia declared her ignorance of the subject, Miss Madersfield appealed to Dick, who responded at once.

"It has been heard two or three times and seen once," he replied.

"In the same place?"

"Yes; on the face of the cliff beyond Chamra House."

"You don't believe in it, do you, Mr. Pensax?" said Maud, who had no intention of allowing him to be appropriated by any one else.

"I don't know," he said, with a provoking smile, as though he knew more about it than he chose to say. "I am sure that something uncanny has been seen."

"What do the soldiers think of it?" asked Miss Madersfield.

"I'm told that they laugh and make fun of it," replied Pensax. "They go out in parties hoping to see it. I believe one man has shot at it."

"What was the result?"

"A yelling that made his blood curdle. He was convinced that he had shot a native woman, and he bolted back to barracks in a blue funk. Fortunately no dead bodies were found, so he heard no more of it. He vows he'll never shoot a ghost again."

"Did he tell you so himself?" asked Nonia.

Pensax did not reply, and Maud said at once, "I should like to see the ghost immensely. Do you think if we made a moonlight party to the place it would manifest itself?"

"An excellent proposal!" exclaimed Pensax. "Nonia, will you come?"

Maud heard the use of the Christian name, and again the little arrow of jealousy struck her as she watched first one and then the other narrowly. She was reassured as she noted Nonia's indifference. It was unmistakable. There could not be any secret understanding between the two.

"No thanks, no ghost-hunting for me. I've heard it more than once, and don't want to hear it again," was the reply, given with a coldness that would have allayed the fiercest flame of jealousy. She turned to her aunt's companion to answer a string of questions as to what the cry was like and its probable origin.

"Let's go to the totalisator and do a little gambling," said Maud to Dick in a low voice.

"With pleasure! It will be a bit of a crush; the soldiers are very keen about it."

"I don't mind with you. It will be rather fun to find myself in the middle of the red-coats. Usually one sees them only from a distance. You won't be bored, will you?"

She met his glance with a mixture of courage and shyness that he understood, and he led her away. Nonia glanced after them. She was glad to have his attention diverted. At the same time the doubt crossed her mind whether he was in earnest in all that he had said to her. Was he in love with her? or was he only anxious to find a pleasant companion for a wife—with money? Then she immediately blamed herself for her mean suspicions, and put down his apparent fickleness to a sunny, impressionable nature that was always ready before all things to amuse and be amused.

Not far from where Nonia was sitting Warborough stood at the outer edge of the stand. He was talking to Mrs. Oswald. His expression indicated nothing. Now and then he smiled as Mrs. Oswald spoke, but otherwise his features wore their usual repose. He and Nonia had not met since the night of the dance. By mutual consent they avoided each other. He schooled himself into the belief that she was the wife of Pensax. She rejected the supposition altogether, and was conscious of an overwhelming desire to believe that she was free and to give all Warborough's eyes asked. She longed to scatter reserve to the winds; to throw her arms round his neck again, and put her lips to his, and pray him to take her into his keeping. The intensity of her desire held her silent and often *distrait*. Once only his eyes met hers across the feathers and flowers and sun topees of the company. She could not read what they said; they were so swiftly withdrawn. It was when

Dick was leaning over her in his impressive manner indulging in sentimental memories of the past.

Oh, that dreadful past! How it returned upon her like an evil shadow! No need for her to go ghost-hunting! The spirits of the past came back too often to need the search of other spooks!

CHAPTER XXII

The large luncheon tent was filled to overflowing. The regiment was entertaining its friends and friends' friends. Mrs. Oswald, with the wives of two other officers of the regiment, had their hands full in seeing that the strangers, shy and diffident of accepting their hospitality, were gathered in.

Berringham did not allow his duties to interfere with his pleasure, and when lunch was ready he made his way towards Mrs. Cotheridge. His wounded feelings with regard to Nonia and her flippant treatment of his advances were healed. Mrs. Cotheridge was all smiles at the prospect before her daughter; for though Berringham had not yet spoken, his eyes had forestalled his tongue, and said all that was necessary to lift any clouds of doubt that might linger in the mother's more experienced mind.

Ivy was less satisfactory in her parent's eyes. She was like a fluttering errant demoiselle dragon-fly. No one could say where next she would alight or how long her fancy might be chained. Hitherto Devon had seemed to be in the running, and Mrs. Cotheridge was already beginning to dream dreams about her younger daughter's future. The dreams stood in danger of being shattered at a moment's notice. Devon was occupied more or less all day with the business of the racecourse, and Ivy had consoled herself with Bewley. Already she had found opportunity to impart the confidential information to her mother that

Mr. Bewley was quite the most good-looking man on the course. Mrs. Cotheridge shook her head.

"What about Captain Devon, Ivy? I thought you had decided that he took the palm in that respect."

"Oh, he's a dear!" she replied warmly. "But Mr. Bewley is such fun! You don't mind, do you, mumsie dear? I do love chaffing him because he can still blush so nicely."

"It's you who ought to blush!"

"I do blush often—as often as I can—but," with a pathetic little sigh, "I'm getting too old to do it now without holding my breath——"

"Ivy! I'm shocked!"

"Darling! a girl must go a little way to the dogs to be interesting, and get her head above the others, unless, of course, she's a suffragette; and you wouldn't like me to be that, would you? Don't be frightened. I promise I'll stop short at the right point. I shall be enormously interesting again in my reformation. I shall let a very good-looking man reform me——"

"Oh, Ivy! your tongue is——"

"'As long as a lizard's,' as my schoolmistress once said when she and I were having a scrap together."

"You mean when she was giving you a much-needed lecture."

"That's how she may have put it. There's Mr. Bewley! He promised to take me in to lunch."

Major Berringham and Pansy approached at this moment and carried off Mrs. Cotheridge to the tent, Ivy and Bewley following; the latter was rejoicing in the absence of Captain Devon, whom he made sure would have cut him out.

Devon came a little late. He had pulled off an unexpected success with one of Berringham's horses, the

Image. Both men were popular in the regiment, and when Devon drew to the fore and passed the winning-post by half a length, the win was greeted by a rousing cheer. The Image, as Bewley had told Ivy, was not a favourite, and it was a pleasant surprise for owner as well as rider.

"Have you been gambling, Miss Ivy?" asked Devon across the table, as he dropped into a seat opposite to her.

"Yes; and I've had splendid luck," she replied, her eyes sparkling. "Mr. Bewley helped me——"

"Indeed, I didn't do much. Miss Ivy took her own line and chose her own horses," Bewley hastened to say.

"You ought not to have fared badly under his guidance," said Devon, with a smile at the boy's embarrassment.

"He helped me by buying the tickets. I took three on the Image."

"That was a piece of luck as it happened; but the Image was a rank outsider at starting without a chance. What made you choose him?"

"I only back rank outsiders, poor things! I have discovered a perfect system of luck."

"Do tell us what it is?" said Devon.

"No, don't, Miss Ivy," put in Bewley, "or every one will be imitating you, and then your luck will go."

"How often did it come off?" asked Devon.

"Three times, wasn't it, Mr. Bewley?"

"Not exactly; you won on the three tickets that you bought on the Image. You lost on the others."

"Yes; that's what I meant. I won three times on the Image, your mount, Captain Devon; and I cleared forty-one rupees."

"Did you really clear forty-one?" asked Devon, who was acquainted with Ivy's original methods of thought.

"On the Image I did."

"Ladies' betting and system of doing accounts are the most topsy-turvy things I know; as intricate and mysterious as their chiffons," said a man sitting by Devon. He had been listening with much amusement to Devon's attempt to arrive at Ivy's gains and losses.

"How much did you lose?" asked Devon patiently, digging away to find his facts.

"I didn't count. Let me think. I started with thirty rupees that mother gave me, and I added seven out of my own pocket. Of course I had to lose a little; everybody must expect that. But think of the joy of winning—thanks to Mr. Bewley!" (The allusion to his assistance again upset his equilibrium.) "Forty-one rupees all at once; and of having it poured into my hands in silver coin."

"Just a pound weight of dirty silver! I gather that you are four rupees to the good," said Devon. "When you have paid your mother back——"

"Oh, no one ever thinks of paying mother back! That would be the greatest mistake in the world, for you would never see the money again; it would all go in the bazaar account."

At which the scoffer made more ribald remarks anent women's ways of dealing with figures.

"Anyway, we know how to smile when we lose," said Ivy, taking up the cudgels on behalf of her sex. "Look at me; Captain Devon makes out that I've lost thirty-seven rupees and gained only four instead of forty. If he is right just see how happy and contented I am! It hasn't affected my appetite in the least, and I don't feel like committing suicide, which is what a man's mind dwells on when the luck is against him."

There was no lingering over the lunch for those who were interested in the racing. Devon got up with a laugh, saying that he must leave it to Bewley to give Miss Ivy a

lesson in finance. Other people followed, and the stand was once more crowded.

The last race was for the "Hack Stakes," in which Pensax was riding the Dark'un. More than one pair of eyes watched for the spot of black on the course. Nonia's followed the familiar figure as he passed out of the saddling enclosure. The Dark'un was behaving like a lamb, and Pensax seemed to be without anxiety as to his conduct. As he came up to the starting-point a group of soldiers on the slope above greeted him in friendly fashion. He looked up at them and lifted his hand in recognition.

Warborough observed what passed, and it set him thinking. He possessed other proofs of intimacy existing between Pensax and the men; and he was puzzled. The prospecting business did not bring Pensax into contact with them, and they had nothing to do with him in the performance of their military duties. As a rule, the men quartered at Wellington led an isolated life, amounting with the majority to dulness. Neither in their sports nor in their work were they associated with the visitors at Coonoor. What was the object of cultivating the men's acquaintance? Was the medium of communication between them the traffic in drink and drugs?

The horses were assembling at the starting-point. There was a large number of entries and rather a crowded field. Several false starts were made before they got away. The Dark'un, contrary to expectation, kept his temper and went off with the rest. Pensax, who was smoking a cigarette up to the last minute, rode with a steady, reassuring hand upon the rein and without whip or spurs. He seemed able to communicate his own cheerfulness to the horse, and the animal ran as if he were thoroughly enjoying the contest.

The distance was short, but the untrained horses found it all too long. They fell away winded for want of training

The Dark'un drew to the front, and when the race was three-quarters done Dick found himself leading by a good length. The victory looked sure as well as easy.

A dozen men belonging to the regiment had taken up a position on the hillside near the corner, described by all alike as "nasty." They hailed him in their pleasure at his success with something like a cheer as the Dark'un passed. Pensax heard the sound, and his mind misgave him. Instantly the Dark'un checked his pace, and Dick gave a gentle pressure with his knee to encourage the horse, as he was wont to do when he wanted him to take a hill at a hand gallop. The mischief was done, however; the Dark'un's temper was ruffled by the unlooked-for hoot of triumph, and he bethought himself of his trick of jibbing, just to show that everything was not to be taken for granted.

They were rounding the corner when the Dark'un drew up sharply, so sharply that his feet slipped beneath him on the wet turf and he came heavily to the ground head-foremost. The horse behind him was pressing close at his heels. It was impossible to stop or even swerve aside. Before the horrified spectators had realized that one man was down another was on the top of him. A third horse was pulled violently aside by his rider in the hope that he might get past safely, but he too slipped and fell; and there were three struggling animals perilously intermixed with three riders on the ground.

Warborough had been watching the race, following Pensax closely with his glasses. He was a good horseman himself, and might have been riding but for the fact that he did not own a horse suitable to enter for any of the races; and no one had asked him to ride. He could not help admiring Dick's handling of the horse, as well as the sporting spirit he had shown in entering him for the

"Hack Stakes." He knew the tricky nature of the handsome animal, and the possibilities that were behind that wilful, capricious nature. It would hardly be correct to say that he anticipated evil; yet he was undoubtedly conscious of the possibility of an accident of some sort by which Pensax would lose the race.

At the sight of the confused group of struggling men on the ground and of iron-shod hoofs gleaming in the sunlight above their heads he felt his blood run cold. A chill gripped and held his heart, while thoughts, which had never entered his brain before, struck deep with appalling distinctness. No human being has absolute control over his thoughts or his visions. They rise unbidden and stand out with uncompromising clearness, however much the eyes may close against them or the hands be raised to beat them down.

The situation, as it suddenly presented itself to Warborough's mind, was full of potentialities.

"What if Pensax were killed? What would such a contingency mean for himself and Nonia?"

The blood ran to his brain with sudden heat after that first moment of stagnation, quickening his perception. He realized with wonderful celerity and vividness that the death of Pensax would be a severing of the knot of difficulties which encircled Nonia like a barbed wire fence. She would be free; free to marry when and whom she chose.

As he held his glasses focussed on that group he saw the figures gradually disentangled from the *mêlée* and rise one by one. A horse was pulled on to its feet by the hands of many helpers. A man was lifted and was apparently able to stand with the aid of an arm. Another scrambled up unassisted, but the third remained like a log on the wet loamy turf where he fell, and by him lay his horse as still

and motionless, except for convulsive quivers of pain, as his rider; and the colour of the fallen man's jacket was black.

Warborough lowered the glasses and glanced round at the people on the stand with a furtive, almost guilty sense of having been caught like a schoolboy doing something he should not do. His eye searched the company for Nonia, but she was not visible. Were her thoughts as his? The names of the men who were down had been repeated on all sides, Pensax's among them; she must be aware that an accident had happened. He wondered what was passing through her mind. Had she, too, experienced that sudden sense of relief? the bursting of her bonds, the unspeakable gift of freedom?

He could not rest where he was; nor could he bear to face her until he knew the best and worst. Even then the sense of guilt might hang about him; for try as he would, he could not bring himself to hope that Pensax lived. He followed the stream of men who were making for the spot to learn the truth, and resolutely shut his eyes to the fact that in the depth of his heart hope was on the wrong side; that an unholy gladness might flame up if that hope were fulfilled, which would make him in spirit though not in deed a murderer.

A stretcher was improvised for the fallen man and a rifle was sent for for the horse. The Dark'un had jibbed his last. A badly broken leg necessitated a bullet to put a merciful ending to the agony of splintered bones.

"Is Pensax hurt?" asked Warborough of Devon in a voice which he scarcely recognized as his own.

"Bashed about a bit; but no bones broken."

"Is he much knocked about?" he inquired with that same horrible sense of guilt. He felt that he must know the truth at all costs, and he waited, strangely moved, yet showing nothing of the fire within.

"I think not. There may be a little concussion; but he was coming round as they lifted him on to the stretcher. How he escaped a broken neck I can't imagine. By all the laws of such accidents he ought to have been killed on the spot."

They walked together to the weighing-in tent where he was carried, and waited to hear the verdict. Ten minutes later the doctor emerged, and without waiting to be questioned he announced that Pensax had had a marvellous escape.

"The fellow is practically unhurt. How he was let off so cheaply is a mystery. A bruise or two and a knock on the head which will give him a headache for a couple of days is all that's the matter."

"The Dark'un has done for himself, though," remarked Devon, as the report of a rifle rang through the air.

"Just as well that the horse suffered and not his rider," replied the doctor, moving away in search of some conveyance by which Pensax might be conveyed to the hotel.

Warborough walked back to the stand rapidly with the doctor's words ringing in his ears. "Just as well that the horse suffered and not his rider!" Was it as well? What did the sparing of his life mean but the darkening of Nonia's—and his own. For himself it did not matter, but for her sake it would have been better if—— He checked himself suddenly, recalling her horror of death, expressed on the day he dropped in to tea and received an unexpected welcome from Teddy. No! Pensax's death would not come as a relief, but rather as a source of grief. Her pity would flow freely, and she would mourn for him as if she were his wife.

At the stand he ran the gauntlet of a fire of questions, to which he gave a continuous answer, repeated many times before he reached Nonia.

"Bruised a bit, but not hurt. Bruised and shaken, but not seriously hurt."

She heard it before he reached her. Her eyes met his, brave, steady, and unflinching. He could read no sign in them of the unworthy thoughts that had assailed himself, no regret at the news that he brought. Nothing but gladness shone in them. Such a way of escape had never entered her mind, he felt certain. And in the purity of her own heart she was free from all suspicion of the truth. She believed him to share her feeling and to be in perfect sympathy with herself.

"I am glad that it is not death—oh, so glad!"

At a sign he came closer still, and she said in a low voice which only his ears caught in the buzz of conversation—

"Not across a grave! Love cannot be blessed that comes over a grave!"

He understood, and turned away without another word, ashamed that even for a brief moment he had allowed hope to range itself on the wrong side.

CHAPTER XXIII

The race week was over with its three days of racing and the various other social events which were crowded into the six days for the benefit of the visitors.

Pensax was unable to ride in the rest of the races for which he was booked. His accident meant four days' confinement to his room and another two days spent in convalescent loafing. He fretted at the enforced idleness, but bore it with his usual cheerfulness, grumbling in an amused way, as though Dame Fortune had played a practical joke on him. The time was not altogether lost, as he told his friends. It gave him opportunity to prepare his reports for the syndicate.

Rumour said that he had done well in his betting transactions; but if so he showed no sign of elation over the matter. Money seemed plentiful, more than enough for his needs; yet, as Nonia was well aware, if no one else in Coonoor knew it, Dick had no fortune of his own, and was obliged to work for all that he received. In talking to Warborough, who went in to see him every day, sometimes more than once, he frankly admitted that he had not come out of it badly except for the fall; but the admission was casual, as though it was not of much consequence whether he lost or won.

On the seventh day after his fall he was at work again and in the saddle. The two horses entered for the races were brought into use as hacks, and a third was hired.

"You will have your work cut out for you to keep the animals exercised," said Warborough. They were dining together again at the little table in the dining-room.

"I have plenty for them to do. I rode twenty miles to-day, and I shall cover forty to-morrow." Warborough looked as near being surprised as it was possible for him. Pensax noted his expression and continued: "I have just about as much as I can get through to complete this prospecting business and make a neat job of it. A week of idleness has set me back, and it is difficult to recover the lost time."

"Your time is your own," remarked Warborough. "You're not driven down any narrow line of routine."

Pensax laughed; there was always a mirthful ring about his laugh that suggested boyish fun; it was the laugh of a man who amuses himself rather than that of one who labours seriously.

"You think I am playing with my work. I gave you credit for longer sight than old Lutterworth has. You're wrong; no man in India works harder for his living than I do. I tell you what it is, Warborough." He lowered his voice, though there was no need for it; the large company of visitors made sufficient noise to cover ordinary speech. "You don't believe in my prospecting."

His eye rested on his companion with a twinkle of amusement. If he was looking for any sign of embarrassment at the sudden charge he was disappointed. Warborough's features wore their customary passivity and expressed nothing. The corners of his mouth moved slightly, and he spoke with the ghost of a smile.

"I've seen nothing of it up to the present; all the same, I'm prepared to take your word for it until I have good cause to believe otherwise."

"Anyway, Lutterworth thinks it all rot; and as for

you, you might truthfully say that you were open to conviction."

Warborough made no reply; he was quite ready to leave Pensax in undisturbed possession of any opinion that he might form about himself. The latter went on—

"At one time I was under the impression that you were making something out of cinema films. I've altered my opinion. You're after something else, and it is not the play of an idle man on leave." Without waiting for comment he continued, "If you have nothing to do to-morrow, come out with me and see my coolies at work. It will be a matter of a twenty-mile ride, and you'll want a second horse."

"I have one."

"Send him out with mine. You must give your man the order to-night, as mine starts at three in the morning."

"In which direction are you working?"

"Out towards Mysore. I've had a good find close to the Mysore boundary. The worst of it is that the vein in all probability runs in the Mysore direction, which may create difficulties over royalties. Another trouble is that my employers have limited my time. Any day I may receive marching orders." There was a slight pause. Pensax broke it by saying abruptly, "Have you seen anything of Miss Armscote lately?"

"Not since that day you had the accident."

"Did she see me fall?"

"I don't know. She heard of it immediately on the stand where she was sitting with Miss Madersfield, if she didn't actually see you come down."

"Was she much upset? Did she say anything?"

"I wasn't near her at the time. I set her mind at

rest a quarter of an hour later, after I had heard from the doctor that you were not seriously hurt, and she seemed relieved."

"What did she say?"

"Something to the effect that she was glad you were not killed. Every one agreed that you had a marvellous escape."

"So I had. I was sorry to lose the Dark'un; but rather him than me. I'm a coward where death is concerned, and I don't mind saying so."

It was the first time Nonia's name had been mentioned between them, and the subject dropped as suddenly as it had arisen.

"May I see a map of the country we shall ride through to-morrow morning?" asked Warborough, as Pensax rose from the table.

"Delighted; come and have a look at it now."

They went to the smoking-room and again the rolls were produced. Pensax spread out a large sheet and pointed with a pencil to the different spots.

"Here are Dodabetta, Coonoor, Kotagiri, and this is the Mysore Ditch. I'm working here." He indicated a place close to the Mysore border. "These red lines are roads by which the ore may be transported. You see I have a lot to consider. It isn't only the stuff itself. There's the transport—that means roads and gradients for iron rails; the water supply for driving machinery; level spaces for coolie lines and bazaars, all have to be considered and reported on. Transport and water supply are the most necessary, and about these my employers want detailed and accurate information. They've got to haul their plant up before they can carry anything away—timber-baulks, sleepers, steel rails, heavy machinery; and that can't be done without good roads."

Warborough studied the map with absorbing interest, asking one or two questions. Pensax went on—

"The shortest way is not always the quickest, as I dare say you've heard often enough. It surprises me that the railway was built on the side of the hills where they are steepest. Now, if I had been consulted I should have made the alignment on the Mysore side and run the line over the plateau. That little mountain railway with its rack system is a toy. What good would it be for the transport of minerals? You want an adhesion line for heavy traffic."

"Perhaps the fact of Mysore being a native state and not under British rule may have had something to do with their choice."

"It doesn't affect the disposition of troops. Look at Bangalore! This is a conquered country, garrisoned and ruled by the British for its own immeasurable good, a fact that mustn't be forgotten where roads and railways are concerned. If we are allowed the concession of a large military station in the very centre of Mysore, we need not scruple in asking for a corresponding concession regarding a railway. An isolated station like Bangalore would be none the worse for any number of outlets."

Warborough listened in silence, seeing Pensax in a new light. This trifler, the owner of showy mounts and warbler of love songs, should have been in his own service. He was wasted on a money-grubbing syndicate of company promoters. The map Pensax had made with its notations was up-to-date, and ought to be in the Survey Office.

"These dotted lines in blue are old roads that might be cleared of jungle and used for wheeled traffic. These dotted lines in yellow are overgrown riding-roads where pack cattle and porters and mounted horsemen might pass; but they wouldn't do for wheeled traffic. Those

squares are level spaces suitable for cooly lines, and the blue crosses mean water supply."

Pensax pointed out the details with the pride of an artist who had successfully mastered his subject.

"Now, if I had been at the head of Government, I should have made four or five times the length of adhesion railway round this way." He drew his finger along the map. "I should have had the military station here, on the borders, and there would be a free run up to Bombay on the north-west and to Calcutta on the north-east, and Madras south-west. Of course I might have been wrong, and all sorts of unexpected difficulties might have presented themselves; but, knowing the country as well as I do, I think it unlikely."

"What about expense?" asked Warborough.

"A country that means to be top-dog and hold its position can't stop to think of expense."

"You ought to have been in the army."

The remark brought back the light careless humour of the trifler which had disappeared as Pensax talked of roads and railways.

"I should have made the worst soldier in the world; not amenable to discipline and only a superficial vein of loyalty. I couldn't have stood your peace-times!" he said, with an ebullition of impatience. "You're like good sporting dogs chained to the kennel during the close season; only the dogs are better off in one respect; their close season ends at a given time. Yours lasts indefinitely."

Warborough rose to go, and after a pause said, "All the same, you would have been a useful servant in my department."

"Then why the devil doesn't Government give me a billet?" blazed Pensax, suddenly.

"You didn't present yourself at the right door."

"So I had to look for work elsewhere." Pensax calmed down again, but his speech still showed a strain of bitterness as he went on almost reckless in his admissions. "I belong to the adventurer caste. If I had lived two hundred years ago, I should have been a pirate or cattle-raider or swashbuckler of some sort. I might even have chosen the road, like my namesake Dick. As it is I am—a prospector grubbing for gold."

He laughed as he rolled up his map, and Warborough said good night. Ten minutes later Pensax was pouring out his soul in one of the latest and most sentimental love songs.

The morning broke fine and clear. Pensax and Warborough were in the saddle before the sun had mounted over the shoulder of the hills. The yellow dawn was fresh and cool. Both horses and men felt the exhilarating effects of the air, the magical *soma* of the Nilgiris.

They followed a road that skirted the eastern slopes of Dodabetta, and then turned off into a cart-track that struck almost due north. After leaving the big mountain mass they passed over the open downs of the undulating Nilgiri plateau, which, after many breaks in the shape of hills and wild ravines, joined hands with the Mysore plateau.

The ancient path-finder who had marked out the track had done his work admirably. Neither cliff nor gorge had proved a real barrier to his progress. The way zigzagged over rounded grassy hills; wound down among rocks and boulders into the depths of leafy ravines; forded streams and crossed swamps. As they left Dodabetta and the downs behind them, the vegetation showed signs of a lesser rainfall and a greater amount of heat. The character of the forest changed, the big trees with their noble trunks disappearing, and a jungle scrub appearing in its

place of thorny acacias, bamboos, and palms, tangled almost to suffocation in places with creepers. Conspicuous in its wild beauty was the climbing gloriosa lily, well deserving of its name.

The way was clearly marked, and showed signs of being used. The hillman does not carry his knife for nothing. A fatal hack is given by the traveller to the obtruding branch or trail that threatens to block the road; and a match is occasionally put to the dry grass and bamboo at the end of the hot season to aid the knife in keeping nature within bounds, although firing the jungle is illegal.

The sun bore down upon the riders with considerable power as they insensibly reached the lower elevation, and both were glad to draw rein at half-past nine o'clock. The character of the ground had made the pace slow, as it seldom offered a stretch of any length suitable for a gallop after they left the downs.

An unexpected sight met Warborough's eyes as they pulled up. He had arrived in the middle of a busy camp, with coolies coming and going. They brought in baskets of rock and soil for geological inspection, and took out food for the workers at a distance. They were superintended by an elderly Eurasian named Da Rudra, who had once been in the Government Survey Department, and was now pensioned.

Da Rudra supervised the digging and cutting and the working of a small engine that drove a drill. He had little initiative power. Pensax was the guiding spirit, and Da Rudra was expected to carry out his instructions scrupulously to the letter.

"Got any ore for me to look at?" asked Pensax, as he greeted the old man.

"Yes, sir; but we are very near the borders of Mysore

and the River Mayar that divides Mysore from the Nilgiri district."

"Have you traced the old road leading from the ruined village close by?"

"Yes, sir; it used to go to Gundalpet and then on to Mysore city, but very few people use it now. There are tigers in the forest along the banks of the Mayar river."

"The tigers don't matter in the least; they would clear out. I'm glad to hear that the road might be continued if it were wanted. That would make it possible for the stuff to be carried north. Stamps for crushing might be set up at Nanjangud, the terminus of the railway."

"There would be the river to cross," remarked Da Rudra.

"How do people get over it now?"

"By a ford that is difficult to pass except in the dry season. The banks of the river are high and steep, and then there is the forest."

"Forest can be felled and the river bridged if need be. Let me see your notes. I suppose you have made some while I have been laid up." He turned to Warborough. "It's no sort of good finding gold-bearing quartz if we can't convey it to a convenient place where the stamps can be set up. Take a stroll, Warborough, after you have swallowed your coffee. I have some business to do with Da Rudra. We'll have a late breakfast or early lunch—whichever you like to call it—at half-past eleven."

Meanwhile Da Rudra had entered a small tent pitched under a tree and brought out a packet of papers. He placed them in Pensax's hands without a word; and as Warborough turned away his eyes followed him with distrust. Pensax saw it.

"I brought him over to look at our work. Until I

showed him the camp I don't think he believed in our prospecting."

Da Rudra lowered his voice. "That's Captain Warborough of the Royal Engineers, isn't it? The man who brings up our supplies says that he has come for business, and not for pleasure."

"Probably. What does he say the business is?"

"To find out yours, sir."

Pensax laughed. "Haven't I brought him here for that very purpose?"

Da Rudra's voice sank lower still. "Something is suspected at headquarters, and he is sent to report. His reports are forwarded to the police commissioner. I have a cousin in the office at Madras——"

"All right, Da Rudra. Don't you worry about what doesn't concern you. You're here to prospect for gold, and you're well paid. You stick to your prospecting. Here's your salary in advance for the next six months." He handed him a roll of notes. "The job will soon be finished. I shall pay the coolies directly after breakfast. I sent word to you to muster them?" He looked inquiringly at his subordinate.

"They will all be here at twelve o'clock according to your order, sir."

"Good! Now let me read your notes, and you can give me any explanations I may need."

Warborough walked away in a northerly direction. The path ran along the centre of what had once been a roadway. Scrubby trees and tough thorny vegetation had obliterated all sign of the road itself; but the alignment was visible to an experienced eye. The track was clearly defined and well trodden by the coolies. It turned and twisted, still descending at a gentle, almost imperceptible gradient towards Mysore the plateau. He concluded that

Pensax was quite right about it being a suitable country for an adhesion railway; but whether the greater distance it would have to run and the foreign territory it must pass through would prove a disadvantage he could not say. It must depend on the traffic. At present the Nilgiri railway was sufficient for the needs of Coonoor and Ootacamund.

An abrupt turning brought him to a clearing in the jungle. Here he found traces of an old village deserted for some long forgotten cause; probably a visitation of plague or cholera. An ancient temple built of stone was still standing in the centre under a very old tree, which showed few signs of life. Beneath the tree the remains of an altar platform, where sacrifices were once offered, were visible. A black stone carved in relief with entwined cobras, overthrown by the Muhammadans when they took possession of Mysore, had been set up again and was leaning precariously against the tree. The superstitious coolies had anointed the stone with oil, and propitiated the evil spirit it represented by the sacrifice of a fowl and by an offering of camphor, sugar, and butter.

Shrubs and creepers and rank vegetation of all sorts had sprung up in the streets and covered everything with a mantle of green. The recent showers had brought forth blossoms of all colours; conspicuous among them was the scarlet and orange lily. Nothing remained of the houses but low mud walls. Beams, rafters, and roof trees had long ago disappeared through the agency of the white ant. The red tiles that once kept sun and rain out of the better houses of the village lay in heaps on the floors buried in greenery.

Behind the temple was a small building of stone impervious to the white ants and the weather, and roofed with thin slabs of stone. A long strand of creeper with lilac

convolvulus blossoms hung its trails before the opening. It was the rest-house or chuttrum of the village where the stranger might find shelter and cook his food, whatever his caste might be.

As Warborough strolled past the building a native emerged from the dark interior. To his astonishment he recognized Periyar, the Hindu watchman at Chamra House. He stopped, and Periyar salaamed low.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I help Mr. Pensax by bringing in supplies, sir."

"What supplies?"

"Food for the coolies and tiffin for Mr. Pensax."

Warborough passed on. He was puzzled. He seemed to be in possession of a bundle of disconnected facts which at present he was unable to link together to his satisfaction. He had come to the conclusion that the Hindu was at the bottom of the illicit trade in drugs, and he had acquitted Pensax in his mind of complicity. At the sight of the Hindu the question presented itself as to whether it was possible that Pensax was financing Periyar and allowing him to trade under the protection of his prospecting.

He did not follow the path much further. After leaving the village it continued northwards through alternate patches of scrub-jungle and open rocky ground, which for want of water showed signs of being arid in the dry seasons. Blue hills were visible in the distance, and over Mysore a soft haze of sunny heat floated, ripening the crops of the ryots and bringing sweet-scented blossom to the trees that bordered the long roads.

Warborough turned and strolled back to the spot where he had left Pensax and Da Rudra. Their business was finished and Pensax was ready to visit the different places within walking distance where the work was in progress.

"Come and see how it's done," said Pensax, without a

trace of embarrassment at the sight of Periyar standing about twenty yards away, waiting for an opportunity of getting speech with the master. "What do you want?" he cried to the Hindu.

The man approached and handed him a note, which he glanced through and placed in his pocket.

"All right; you can come up with the coolies when I pay them, and I'll settle your account. I shan't want any more supplies up here. We shall move camp to-morrow." Pensax turned to Warborough. "He's the middle man, and supplies the camp with vegetables and other necessaries. I have another man for the meat and rice and curry stuff. They make a good thing out of it, though I haven't a large staff by any means."

"Long distance for them to come, isn't it?"

"They don't consider it long. Those fellows walk forty and fifty miles and think nothing of it. He sends the stuff along by bullock-cart as far as he can. Then some of my coolies bring it on into camp."

"I wonder how he manages to do your work and at the same time fulfil his duties at Chamra House?"

"It's quite an easy matter. He probably finds a substitute if he is obliged to be away more than twelve hours, or shirks it altogether for a night or two. He is only on duty from sunset to sunrise, and there's no one to look after him to see that he is at his post. He's the man who supplies my coolies with drink."

"Then why do you employ him?" asked Warborough, as he followed Pensax down a rough path leading into the bed of a nullah.

"When you've had the experience that has fallen to my lot of dark skins, whether African or Asiatic, you will learn that they cannot live without drink and drugs. If they don't get them from one source they will from another. I

prefer to recognize the need ; then I can control the supply to a certain extent, though I can't keep the men sober if they are determined to be otherwise."

"The Hindu is not a man I should trust," remarked Warborough, casually.

"Periyar is an unscrupulous scoundrel, who would knock me on the head or knife me as soon as look at me, if it suited his purpose. Fortunately it serves his end best to work for me. We remain on good terms, and I am able to control the supply of drink and drugs."

"I suppose he is one of these illicit purveyors the police are after."

Pensax laughed as if it were a good joke. "I dare say ; but that's not my affair. I have nothing to do with it, and what is more, I have no proof that Periyar comes by it illegally. He may purchase the supplies he brings at one of the licensed shops in Coonoor for all I know. Now, just look at this." He stopped before a cutting in the rugged side of the nullah. "This is undoubtedly a sign of the presence of gold-bearing quartz, exactly similar to the reefs of the Kolar goldfields in Mysore."

"Have you had it assayed ? "

"Yes ; but there is not sufficient in the actual stuff on the surface to make it pay. There is good reason, however, for believing that this is only the top fin of the whale's back, so to speak. It is enough to warrant deeper borings."

"The whole thing is a lottery, of course."

"Exactly so ! No one can tell till they reach the stuff and mill it what results it will give. My business is to report ; I'm not going to exploit it."

"And you will advise your syndicate to open here ? "

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I'm not asked for advice in my trade. I'm only asked for accurate reports on what I find and for a general account of the country."

He laughed as though he found something humorous in the contemplation of his occupation. Warborough had not the same sense of humour, and did not join in the laugh.

"You're amused at something," he said.

"The thought of my employers, that's all. I know them and you don't. If you did, you might think that I had reason for something else besides laughter. The whole thing amuses me; it mightn't appeal to your sense of humour."

"How far are we from the borders of Mysore?" asked Warborough, who was at a loss to understand his companion.

He and Pensax had climbed out of the nullah and stood on the opposite bank.

"Only a few miles. You see that wonderful country to the north of us. Its surface is rich in soils that produce forest, grass, and grain in profusion. Underneath that soil lies an enormous treasure in store for a future generation. There is gold everywhere, gold such as they have sampled—only sampled, mind you—at Kolar."

"Why isn't it worked?"

"Because the gold is at too great a depth for the mining experts to get at it. Until they have learned to conquer water and heat, the heat of the earth—it may surprise you to hear what the temperature is in some of the Kolar gold-mines—their only chance is to find places like that"—he pointed to the nullah they had left—"where the reef crops out, as I said just now, like the fin of a big fish. Even then the reef may not bear enough gold near the surface to make mining pay. It's not equally charged throughout. Oh! it's a tremendous gamble! I can tell you!"

They walked on to other places where the pickaxe, the drill, and small charges of dynamite had done their work, and then returned to the shade of the jungle. An

excellent lunch was spread under one of the trees. They did not linger over it. Already the coolies had collected to receive their wages. Apparently Pensax treated them liberally, for there was no grumbling, and all seemed satisfied.

"We'll make an early start if you don't mind," said Pensax, as he came back to Warborough, who had remained in the shade. "I want to catch the evening post."

Warborough had no objection. He had learned all that the expedition could teach him. The visit to the camp had not been unprofitable, since it enabled him to answer certain questions that had recently been asked. There were still two or three points, however, that required clearing up.

During the ride back to Coonoor very little conversation passed between them, for Pensax set the pace and pushed on as rapidly as possible. At one point where the road was too steep for anything but a walk Warborough asked a question.

"Where did you get your training for this kind of work?"

"At one of the German schools of mines. My mother married a man in the army. He died when I was a small kid. She was left rather badly off; so she took me over to Germany, and we lived there ten years. When I was fifteen my uncle sent me to a public school in England and did his best to get me into the army. But I failed. He pointed out that I could not continue to live on my mother indefinitely, and asked me what I wished to do. I elected to train at one of the German mining schools, and we went back to Germany. I took my diploma, and about that time my mother died. I returned to England to look for employment; but it is not the place for the mining expert nowadays. I went out to Africa, and when I came home I met Nonia Armscote at my uncle's house."

He paused, and his listener did not speak. "I went again to Germany for a few weeks, hoping to get a billet through my old school. There I was introduced to the syndicate I'm working for now."

"Then your syndicate is a foreign one."

"The companies will be formed in England if they ever see light; but that's nothing to do with me, as I said before. I've no interest whatever in their schemes of exploitation."

They trotted on again, and at the next check Pensax answered an unspoken query that had been in Warborough's mind.

"The syndicate talks of sending me to hunt for coal next."

"In Germany?"

"No; in India. But I'm just a little tired of my work. I want a rest. I could do with a year's loafing between England and the Riviera—if I could persuade any one to join me."

Warborough was silent. He divined the trend of his thoughts, for he knew more than Pensax was aware of. Again the doubt assailed him that certain rights lay with Pensax, and when the time came he intended to exercise them.

CHAPTER XXIV

That evening Warborough found himself alone at the dinner-table, Pensax being occupied in his room. When dinner was over Warborough strolled out into the verandah. It was a fine night, warm and still. He was just settling himself down into a comfortable chair near a couple of men with whom he often had a chat—that is to say, they talked and he listened with sufficient comment to show that he was interested—when a servant approached and handed him a note. It was from Lutterworth, asking if he would come down to his bungalow; he wanted to speak to him for a few minutes.

Warborough obeyed the summons at once, and found the Assistant Superintendent of Police in his verandah lighting up his after-dinner cigarette. As he approached a native with whom Lutterworth had been talking left the bungalow and was lost in the darkness.

"Glad to see you, Warborough. I've got several things I want to discuss with you." He drew up a chair and placed it near his own. "Sit here; then we shan't be overheard. First of all I must tell you that I have examined that photograph you sent me. There's no doubt about the identity of the man. I rode up to the place early this morning by myself and examined it. I found it just what you described. It's one of the places where the men get—what's bad for them; and we shall have to make a raid on it before long. I must choose an opportunity when it's full of men, and

I should like to catch Pensax there. I fancy he would find it difficult to explain his presence among them."

"Which way did you go?"

"Up the road behind Chamra House. I told my inspector that I was going to have a look at the place in broad daylight where the ghost was seen. I left the horse in the road and walked up the ravine by the side of the cliff. I hadn't much difficulty in finding the old gold-mine, for the path is becoming well trodden. I had the place entirely to myself at that early hour. I shall choose the next military holiday for my raid."

"I dare say you're right; you know more about police work than I do," replied Warborough.

"You're interested in the matter, all the same," said Lutterworth, looking at him with inquiry.

"Very much interested. As perhaps you've already discovered, I was sent up here to investigate the case."

"You're the commission Colonel Oswald asked for?"

"That's it! And I'm alone in the business, as I was directed to ask for your assistance as soon as there was sufficient evidence for the police to take action."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Lutterworth, surprised and slightly ruffled. "Why wasn't I told? And why on earth didn't they choose a man in my service for it?"

"Your department is shorthanded."

"The usual tale nowadays!"

"In my branch of the service it was not so, and I was free for special duty. It was partly a military affair; and when my name was mentioned the commissioner was glad to fall in with the arrangement."

"I understand," said Lutterworth. "Probably you were right not to mention it even to me. Where there's an office those sort of things leak out, in spite of all one's care."

"I'm disappointed that I haven't done more to help in setting your machinery in motion."

"You put me on to the gambling and drinking den, which I don't suppose I should have found but for you."

"At one time I was inclined to believe that Pensax had something to do with it; but now my suspicions point to Periyar and some unknown person behind him."

"I've just had Houssain here, the Muhammadan sepoy, who looks after Miss Armscote's menagerie. He has given me information which definitely implicates Periyar and the landlord of Chamra House. I'm still at a loss to account for the friendliness that undoubtedly exists between Pensax and the soldiers. What is the reason for it if it isn't drink?"

"It's a puzzle I'm trying to unravel. By-the-by, have you any notion what the profit would amount to out of the trade?"

"Two or three hundred rupees a month; perhaps less. The difficulty of transport would make a hole in the profits," said Lutterworth.

"A nice little pile for a native; but it wouldn't be worth Pensax's while. His prospecting brings him in a good deal more than that. He gets a thousand a month and all his expenses paid."

"Is he really prospecting? There's been a lot of talk about it, but remember we've seen nothing."

"I've seen it to-day," said Warborough; and he told him of his ride in the Mysore direction. He described the camp and the operations and the unexpected encounter with Periyar.

"That's strange finding the Hindu there," commented Lutterworth.

Warborough repeated what Pensax had said about the supplies.

"In spite of what you say, I can't help thinking that

Pensax has a hand in it somehow. If not, how do you account for this?" He drew the photograph, to which he had alluded when Warborough first came in, from his pocket-book and looked at it again, holding it close to the lamp. "Your telephoto lens is wonderful! There's Pensax, plain enough, with half a dozen soldiers standing round him. They're laughing and talking, the best of friends in the world. I recognize the place. It's just outside the entrance to the enclosure in which the bungalow stands."

He handed the photograph to Warborough, who looked at it again.

"Whether he has anything to do with the supplies or not, he knows what is going on."

"And might have put me on the scent too, if he had chosen!" exclaimed the puzzled police officer. "Did he seem uneasy at your meeting the Hindu in his camp to-day?"

"Not in the least; he was entirely at his ease; as open and straightforward as any one could wish."

"You have no doubt that the prospecting was real?"

"None whatever," Warborough reassured him. "The work had been done systematically and thoroughly. No money had been spared in getting up machinery and tools and blasting materials. He knows his business; and what is more, his heart is in it. He likes the work."

"It wasn't a blind for the drug and liquor trade?"

"Couldn't have been. If he wanted to play that game he is not likely to have taken a gang of coolies and all that prospecting plant out to a place where no one was likely to come across him at work."

"It's a mystery; and I can't see daylight through it at present. However plausible things look, I can't help suspecting the man."

Warborough did not respond. He, too, suspected Pensax; but of something quite different. He believed that he had designs upon Nonia. The belief had been growing ever since she told him the story of her marriage, and of the doubt about the first wife's widowhood. Pensax had set about winning her in sportsmanlike fashion, laying siege to her heart with all the wiles of an ardent lover. Behind it all was the knowledge that he had an infallible trump card up his sleeve, which would give him the victory whenever he chose to play it. It was just like the man to act in this theatrical manner. He was far too fastidious to frighten any woman by violence or threat of force. He would prefer to wait. In the meantime he had found a method of consoling himself by a flirtation with Maud. This facility for consoling himself was not a factor that made for happiness in the life of a wife. Warborough was roused from his train of thought by Lutterworth, who had been revolving in his mind his best course of action.

"I shall arrest the Hindu immediately after the raid, whether I find him there or not. If he says anything to implicate Pensax I may be able to make a case out against him and arrest him too. May I keep this photograph?" It was lying on the table close to the lamp. "It might be useful as evidence."

"By all means keep it."

"May I come in?" said a voice in the darkness of the garden.

The two men looked up, and saw the subject of their conversation standing at the foot of the steps. Lutterworth rose and quietly picked up the photograph before advancing to greet his visitor.

"Come in, Pensax; very glad to see you," responded the police officer, the heartiness of his welcome slightly forced in his surprise.

"Hope I'm not interrupting business," said Pensax, his sensitive nature making him aware that something was in the atmosphere. As his eyes dwelt on Warborough, the latter took upon himself to reassure him.

"Oh, that's all right; quite all right!" he said, rising as if to depart.

"Don't go, Warborough! Here, sit down, Pensax," and Lutterworth, pulled up a third chair near his own. The momentary embarrassment passed, and the three men settled down for a chat, Lutterworth calling for cigars and siphons.

"You don't do business at this time of night, of course," remarked Pensax, as he lighted a cigarette and settled himself in his chair with a due attention—characteristic of him—to ease and comfort.

"As for that, a policeman's business can't always be confined to office hours," replied Lutterworth.

"Of course; I forgot your profession," said Pensax lazily. "I'm a bit tired, Warborough, after my forty-mile ride; aren't you?"

"It was enough for the day."

"How are you getting on with your prospecting?" asked Lutterworth.

"Nearly finished. I shall be closing down in about a week or ten days and paying off all my coolies. I paid some off to-day."

"You can't have exhausted the hills!"

Pensax laughed as he replied, "I've exhausted my employers' funds. They tell me that they know enough for their purposes, and they propose to send me on somewhere else to look for coal."

"That will take you into the wilds and out of reach of military and civil stations."

"Probably," and again he laughed. "Look here,

Lutterworth, let me set your mind at rest over this liquor question. All along you've had a suspicion that I've been at the bottom of it. Let me assure you that I'm not the moving spirit. I know nothing about it, except that my coolies get their drink through the man who supplies the camp with vegetables. They buy it cheap enough to have very inconvenient drinking-bouts sometimes. I've been too busy to inquire into it myself, even if I had been inclined. As I was telling Warborough in camp only to-day, after all the experience I've had, I've learned not to meddle with the dark man and his drink. If he does his work and gets drunk afterwards, that's not my concern. If he gets drunk before his work is done, he is probably fired and another taken on in his place."

Pensax spoke with perfect good nature, and his manner did away with the impression his words might have conveyed that he was excusing himself of complicity. Lutterworth leaned forward and listened in silence, his eyes searching the speaker in his endeavour to grasp the elusive truth. He took out the photograph and put it in Pensax's hands.

"You may not be a moving spirit in the traffic, but you must know something about it. Look at that."

Pensax took the picture and went to the light. "Yes; there I am right enough, outside the old gold-mine," and he handed the photograph back without a sign of confusion and almost without interest, asking no questions as to how Lutterworth had come by it.

"Is it too much to inquire what you were doing there?"

"Not at all. Since you suspect me I shall be glad to answer any number of questions you may like to put. I have met some of the men attached to the depôt and belonging to different corps more than once up there. They have

given me help in my work. One or two of them have sufficient intelligence to be able to describe the formation of the rocks. Those men you see me talking to there had been exploring beyond the cordite factory, and they brought back a lot of specimens. Time hangs heavy on the hands of the well-educated non-commissioned officer up here. He is glad enough to find occupation in botanizing or geologizing or bug-hunting, as he calls it. Those men were delighted when I asked them to pick up specimens in their walks."

Lutterworth admitted that there was very little to do at Wellington, and that the men were always glad of something to amuse them.

"Yet you're not altogether satisfied," said Pensax calmly.

"I didn't say so, and I'm not sure that you are right in your conjecture."

"You don't believe in my prospecting," Pensax persisted, still speaking without any show of irritation. He took a paper from the pocket of his dinner-jacket and held it out to Lutterworth. "Look at this; it's my licence to prospect and survey for mining purposes. Perhaps that will convince you."

Lutterworth took it and studied it carefully. Then he handed it back, saying—

"Yes; that's all right. I wonder if you would mind giving me your opinion about this drug trade? Is Periyar, the Hindu watchman at Chamra House, concerned in it, and his employer, the landlord?"

"I should say so; but I have no evidence to support my belief."

"Do you think any of the soldiers at Wellington are mixed up in it?"

"I've never seen anything that would lead me to believe

that such was the case. All that the men do is to buy the stuff. They're ready enough to do that. No; I don't think any man in the regiment would touch the business; it's too risky, and the men attached to the depôt are not here long enough to be able to handle anything of the sort."

Lutterworth was becoming more and more satisfied in his mind that Pensax was not implicated in the sale, although he must have known for some time past that it was going on. His manner gradually changed from suspicious distrust, which he had striven to hide, to a new cordiality that he made no attempt to conceal.

During the conversation Warborough remained silent. He had listened to the conversation, and had arrived at the same conclusion as Lutterworth. His eyes rested on the face of the prospector as his brain worked. He had recently been asked by the authorities at headquarters if he was acquainted with a man named Pensax who held a licence to prospect for mining purposes, and if so, he was directed to forward as much information as he could pick up without attracting attention concerning his actions: where he was at the present moment, and whether he employed a large staff. He was wondering whether the suspicion entertained by Lutterworth had found its way to the head office.

"What is your opinion on this question?" asked Pensax, turning suddenly to Warborough.

The reply was given at once in a level tone of indifference.

"I haven't one to offer."

"I hope that, like Lutterworth, you've exonerated me from all complicity."

"Certainly. I give you credit now for flying at higher game."

Pensax glanced at him sharply. What did he mean? Was he hinting at Nonia, or was he hinting at something else? The word "now" did not escape him. There was a time, then, when Warborough shared the opinion of the police officer and regarded him with distrust.

"It is not very pleasant to find one's self discredited. I am very glad to have had the opportunity of clearing my character. I shouldn't like to leave the place knowing that I was under a cloud of suspicion."

Warborough rose to go. "I think I will say good night," he said.

"I'll walk back with you," said Pensax. "Good night, Lutterworth."

The two men parted company on reaching the verandah of the hotel and went to their rooms. It was not late, and Warborough had some writing to do; he intended making an expedition to the Hoolicul Droog the following morning if it was fine, and he wanted to clear his writing-table of correspondence. Among other things he completed a confidential report covering his movements during the last three or four days. In this particular letter he explained that his work was practically at an end. He had laid the result of his inquiry before Lutterworth, and the case was now in his hands. He, Warborough, had every reason to believe that the prime movers in it would shortly be arrested and the evil wiped out.

He added a paragraph about Pensax in answer to their inquiries. He had seen the prospecting and the licence. He was of the opinion that both were genuine. Enclosed they would find a sketch-map showing the spot where he had seen the coolies working with the cuttings and borings they had made. He did not consider it a breach of confidence to repeat the information Pensax had voluntarily

given him of coal being probably the next object of his search.

On receipt of this letter the authorities would understand that his work on the Nilgiris was done, and he would probably be transferred to take up special duty somewhere else or to rejoin his station. In anticipation of the move he next drafted an application for leave. He was daily expecting a cable from Colonel Tredmere. Whatever news it might contain he felt that he must return to England. If the news was good, and Tredmere could reassure him as to the validity of Pensax's first marriage, there was no reason why Nonia and Miss Madersfield should not go home with him under his escort. The thought made the warm blood race through his veins. On the other hand, if the news was bad, the sooner he cleared out of India, and put the seas between himself and Pensax's wife, the better it would be for all three of them.

Pensax had gone straight to his room also. On the writing-table lay an envelope containing a telegram. He tore it open. It was written in cipher. By the aid of a key the cipher resolved itself into half a dozen sentences, saying that it was necessary that he should close down the works and leave Coonoor at once.

"By George! they've been pretty sharp, and no mistake. Well, there's nothing for it but to carry out their instructions as quickly as possible. As for Nonia——!" He paused, whistling softly. "I'm bunkered badly. The game is with Warborough."

He turned to the piano and poured out his soul in song. The notes reached Warborough faintly, but not too faint to be recognizable. They were the sad wild farewell of Tosti's "Good-bye"; and Warborough smiled at what he took to be another phase of posing on Dick's part.

He ceased as suddenly as he had begun and called his servant.

"Bring another lamp. This one will soon be out. Tell the syce I shall want the hired horse at five o'clock. He will come with me and bring the horse back to its own stables for its midday feed."

Then he sat down to his writing-table and wrote.

CHAPTER XXV

Warborough started after an early breakfast, taking his lunch with him, and rode down the ghat road. A few miles from Coonoor the road branched off to the right, the main track going down to Mettapollium, the branch passing through some tea plantations and having an upward trend. The cultivated slopes were monotonous and uninteresting. Where once primeval forest had stood, linked with impenetrable trails of creeper, pruned tea bushes grew in uniform rows that only man could have devised. The bed of the mountain torrent that was formerly hidden in masses of luxuriant fern and moss, was nothing but a boulder-strewn depression in the hillside.

He had started rather late, and the sun had acquired considerable power. Not a cloud was visible in the sky. Through the quivering haze of blue the Droog loomed, its precipitious sides losing the blue tint and growing darker and more forbidding as he drew nearer to it. He passed through belts of jungle affording very little shade, and he looked with longing eyes at the forest clinging round the skirts of the hill, and covering its rounded head. There at least he would find a welcome shelter from the fierce rays.

The tea plantations came to an end, and the scenery recovered its primeval wildness with the disappearance of all trace of the hand of man. He dismounted and directed

his syce to lead the horse back. The second horse was to meet him in the afternoon at sunset where the road forked. The walk from the top of the Droog—some seven or eight miles—to this point would be mostly downhill and easy to accomplish in the coolness of the afternoon, when the sun would be dropping behind the range to which the Droog was linked.

The road bore to the right, away from the cliffs and forest-crowned head, and led to the top of the long saddle-back ridge that linked the Droog with the hills on the north-west. The range formed the northern portion of the Bowani river valley.

Warborough ascended the mountain-path at an even pace and without haste, for he had the day before him and his time was his own. Occasionally he stopped to look round. The mountains he had left behind at Coonoor seemed small and insignificant. Even Dodabetta, which rose higher than the Droog, lost its dignity in its bareness.

He entered the forest, and the view disappeared as the giant trees closed in around him. More often than ever he stopped to enjoy his temporary possession of the jungle. He felt that for the day at least its solitudes were his. He shared them with the birds and small game, frightened creatures, too shy to allow a human eye to catch a glimpse of them. The birds were less nervous, although they maintained a watchful attitude of caution.

At his approach the notes of song were exchanged for warning twitters and croaks that conveyed the news of his advent to the timid deer and skulking wild pig and jackal. Now and then he caught sight of a wing outspread with a flash of rare colour gleaming with metallic tints. Once he distinguished the gorgeous plumage of a toucan. Its enormous beak was full of fruit as it plunged with clumsy

flight through the thick foliage towards the Bowani valley, where in a warmer climate and sheltered from the north-east blasts it had its nest with its hungry young.

The forest grew less dense as he reached the top of the ridge. The huge stems of the trees rose to a height of eighty feet, and the rugged arms, thrown out like the spines of an umbrella in irregular order, were festooned with fringes of grey pendant lichen, aptly named "old man's beard." At their feet grew beds of stag's head moss, lycopodium, long trailing fronds of adiantum fern and bracken. The ubiquitous creeper with rank uncontrolled growth sprawled and festooned and climbed till it reached those wonderful domes of foliage overhead.

A python lay sunning itself upon a slab of rock, indifferent to the cries of a large vulture hovering overhead. Secure in the consciousness of its size and strength, it remained undisturbed until it felt the vibration of Warborough's foot. He stopped, as his eye fell upon its quivering coils, and watched it slowly draw away from the rock and move towards the jungle ready to glide down to the very waters of Bowani. Its scales shone with prismatic colours as it moved, the brown markings on its back glowing with metallic greens and blues. Noiseless and without stirring the ferns of its bed, it disappeared into the verdure, leaving no trace of its path.

The track Warborough had been following came to an abrupt end, as far as he could see, against some weather-beaten blocks of stones standing in an open glade. This must be the ruin of the old fort described by Nonia. He mounted a stone block and looked round him. He was shut in by forest on all sides. The old fort itself would have been long since buried in forest if it had not been built on solid rock of the same nature as the cliffs and crags

further east. Grass and fern and shrubs flourished among the masonry, but they were not sufficiently luxuriant to bury it.

As he looked round his eye rested upon the huge trunk of a tree that had half fallen ; it was leaning against some young trees. Their combined strength seemed hardly adequate for the heavy burden. Some of their branches were broken ; others were bent. Under the influence of the next cyclonic storm or even of the ordinary monsoon winds the trunk must inevitably be swept to the ground.

Nonia's description of the dying forest giant came back to him. It must be the very tree she had seen fall. The thought fascinated him, and he stepped down from the old walls to examine it more closely. There was no path ; he was obliged to pick his way as he could through the tall rank grass and tangle of fern and creeper. He thought of the python he had seen a little lower down the path. It would be unpleasant to stumble against its coils, for though it had no poison fangs it might be extremely unpleasant to find himself encircled by its powerful body.

He pushed aside the obstructing undergrowth and arrived at the foot of the tree. To his intense astonishment a man lay fast asleep under the shelter of the leaning trunk. He recognized Pensax.

For some seconds he stood there, looking down at the recumbent form. No word escaped him. The only sign of his surprise was the uplifting of the eyebrows when he first saw him. He tried to remember what had been said the evening before, and whether he had mentioned his intention of climbing the Droog. He could not recall having done so. It was a curious coincidence that he had chosen the same day for his visit to the hill. Pensax had

spoken of the possibility of leaving Coonoor before long. Perhaps he had been actuated by the same reasons as had brought Warborough, the shortness of the time and the favourable weather.

The ground immediately under the tree was dry and in shadow, reason enough for Pensax's choice of the place. Warborough would have preferred to take his rest upon the broad blocks of stone belonging to the fort walls, where there was room for a man to stretch himself at length if he could do without shade. As Pensax lay he was completely hidden from the view of any passing traveller. In one respect this had its advantage. His pockets would not be rifled while he slept by any pilfering native. Yet the contingency of any one coming that way was remote. The path was but little used, and only by the hillmen making a short cut from the valley of the Bowani to Coonoor and Ootacamund. The ordinary traveller would prefer the longer and easier road by way of the pass through which the ghat road and railway ran.

As he gazed at Pensax he expected every moment to see him open his eyes, and he was not best pleased at the prospect of having him as a companion; he had had enough of him the day before. As Pensax continued sleeping and was not disturbed by his approach, he decided to leave him there and let him finish his siesta. Once he glanced upwards at the sloping trunk. From where he stood now it looked larger than ever, and the saplings less able to bear its weight. There were signs, too, that it had recently shifted and broken away more branches under the stress of some storm of wind. The soft morning breeze brushed the young foliage, but was not strong enough to move the bigger branches, and there was no danger to the unconscious man. Warborough concluded that as the tree had stood so long it would stand a little longer, and he

need not trouble himself. It must have weathered many storms since Nonia saw it fall.

Turning away, he tried to penetrate the forest in the direction of the head of the mountain. The view from the top of the cliffs, visible from Coonoor, must be very fine if he could only reach it. He did not get very far. Even if he had possessed the long useful knife of the hillman he could not have made much progress ; the obstructions were too many, and the undergrowth too tough and strong to be easily or swiftly cut away ; nor could he see the formation of the ground to choose his line and avoid rocks and ravines. The attempt brought with it a curious realization of his own physical strength, and its inferiority compared with the strength of unrestrained nature. Just such jungle as this must the coffee and tea-planter have grappled with when he set about clearing the slopes below for his young plants ; and his success was compassed by art and not by mere physical strength.

He turned back towards the ruined fort to make an attempt to explore in another direction. If he could not obtain a view northwards over the pass, he might possibly get a peep at the Bowani valley, that broad sanctuary for bird and beast, where the fastnesses and retreats were never trodden by the foot of man. The density and impenetrable nature of the luxuriant growth compelled the traveller to keep to the path, as Warborough had just discovered.

The top of the ridge was not very broad, and it was unlikely that the track he had followed up to the walls of the fort ended there. On examining it more closely he found that the path skirted round the foundations and passed on to the other side. After twenty minutes' walking he came upon an opening in the jungle. The dark grey gneiss jutted out in all its bareness, giving no foothold

for vegetation. It fell away perpendicularly in a magnificent cliff similar to the crags on the other side of the mountain. From the top he had a view of the country south and west. To his extreme left the plains were visible through the mouth of the valley. He could just distinguish the roads and fields, the tanks and ant-heap towns lying under a hot dusty haze of burnished gold. To his right were the wooded spurs of the Nilgiris, and far below ran the Bowani river over its broad bed of boulders, spreading its waters here into brown pools, where the mahseer fish rose at the fly and splashed in play on the surface of the water; or dashing there with noise and foam against the rocks that obstructed its downward flow.

Acres and acres of forest lay along its banks with no sign of habitation; yet there must be a village hidden here and there in the depths of the jungle, just as there were villages on that eastern side which he had seen from Lady Canning's seat. As evidence of the presence of man he noted the track he had been pursuing. It led into the valley, probably to some ford or wire bridge across the river, eventually reaching a ghat road that took the traveller down to the west coast.

By such mountain paths did the Lumbadees, the Indian gipsies, carry grain and salt of old up into the Mysore and Mahratta countries. On their return journeys they bore the precious sandalwood smuggled out of Mysore. Those were troubled times when the fertile plateau was the subject of continuous strife. Here on this very spot Haider Ali, the Muhammadan usurper of Mysore, might have stood and gazed with a coveteous eye over those southern lands that his hordes of horsemen pillaged and devastated but never succeeded in conquering.

Warborough's eye dwelt on the scene with a longing

for the companionship of the one person whose thoughts would flow with his. Nonia, if she were there, would revel in the historical memories that it conjured up. In fancy she would rebuild the fort and people it again with Meadows Taylor's hero immured within, a fierce band of Mysoreans guarding his prison.

As his eyes lingered on the beautiful valley and forest-clad mountains he noted broad shadows that turned the green of the jungle into a deep transparent ultramarine. He looked up; a heavy cloud floated in the sky, its rounded head outlined in multiple golden lines. With marvellous swiftness it gathered in density and threatened to shut out the sun before long. From the valley below responsive vapours were beginning to curl towards the heavens, following the lines of the ravines down which the mountain streams sent their waters to the river.

He turned and made his way back to the fort in leisurely fashion, wondering if he could find shelter among those broken walls should it come on to rain. Now and then he stopped to watch a bird or butterfly as it fluttered over the herbage. The charm of complete solitude was banished by the knowledge of the presence of Pensax. He tried to forget that he was so near. Had he been obliged to take a companion, Dick would have been the last man he would have chosen. He devoutly hoped that the siesta would last until he had departed.

Warborough sought out a spot where he could sit and rest, and presently eat his lunch in comfort. It was cool and pleasant on the top of the mountain, but on the ghat road it would be hot and airless until the sun was lower.

He leaned back against the masonry. Though the solitude was spoilt for him, the silence was there. After a time the birds gained confidence, and ventured out of the

leafy bowers in which they had taken refuge on his reappearance. He watched a woodpecker with speckled plumage streaked with blood-red tints as it sidled round the trunk of a tree in search of food. The tapping of its beak made one of the voices of the forest with its steady rhythmic beat. A gleam of sunshine brought out a pair of golden orioles, and the brilliant toucan reappeared in search of more fruit. A couple of blue roller birds tumbled out of the thick foliage with shrieks and curses in fierce fight, and some feathers flew. As the leaves were violently shaken a heavy-bodied moth blundered into the sunlight and sought cover in the herbage below. The pageant of the forest was ever changing with its varied sights and sounds that were a continual delight to the eye.

A rumble of distant thunder suddenly fell on his ear. He glanced up and discovered that the heavy cloud was not alone in the sky. Other gilt-edged masses of vapour lifted their rounded heads above the line of forest, and a few minutes later the sun was once more veiled. With the obscuring of the sun came a gust of wind that swept over the trees and brought down a few withered leaves. Again the thunder sounded; this time it was louder than before; it came from the Bowani valley, and its low muffled roll told Warborough that it was below instead of above him. Storms in the hills were capricious in their movements, gathering and dispersing with wonderful rapidity.

He unstrapped his waterproof coat ready for use. It was better to take what shelter he could find under the old walls rather than to start on his journey home in the teeth of the storm. He slipped on his coat and looked round to see if anything better in the way of a screen was to be obtained, and he concluded that the first position he had taken up was the best. As he resettled himself his eye fell on the leaning tree, and he suddenly remembered Pensax,

whom he had entirely forgotten for the time in the contemplation of birds and insects. The thunder had not roused him, and apparently he was still sleeping. The spot he had chosen might be sheltered from the rain and sun, but it was exposed to another and a greater danger than moisture and heat. Should the storm burst overhead, or, what was more likely, partly above and partly below the mountain, the lightning might strike the tree and Pensax would assuredly be killed.

Again the thought that had assailed him on the racecourse forced itself through his brain with vivid insistence. Where was the good of preserving his life? Why should he, Warborough, lift a finger to shield from remote danger the man who stood between himself and happiness?

He thrust it aside angrily, and stepped down from his nook. Even as he reached the grass below he paused, still wavering between duty and inclination; so strongly was he tempted to leave the man to take his chance. It was with a distinct effort that he again pushed through the undergrowth towards the tree.

Pensax had not stirred. Warborough stood looking down at him, watching the scarcely perceptible movement of his chest under the regular breathing. Placing a hand on his shoulder, he shook him gently. The sleep of the tired man was deep, and he made no response; he might have been a log of dead wood lying there.

Once more he shook him, this time more roughly, bringing his hand down upon his shoulder with a light blow; but it had no effect.

Warborough stood up, tempted to let the sleeper alone. Again he asked himself why he should take any trouble over the matter. The old tree had passed through many thunderstorms and had escaped. Why should he fear that the lightning would be directed against it to-day? Pensax

would probably awake before long. Perhaps the roar of the storm would rouse him.

He was about to retrace his steps when Nonia's words came back to him—"Not across a grave!" Release through death was abhorrent to her. It ought to be abhorrent to him.

At that moment the thunder echoed again in the valley; this time it was louder, although it was still muffled by its low elevation. If Nonia were by his side what would she ask him to do? He knew as well as if she actually stood there and spoke.

A keener blast of wind swept over the forest, bending back the branches of the saplings and causing the old trunk to quiver. He bent over Pensax and took him by the arm to drag him up into a sitting position, but he fell back inert and lifeless.

"Pensax, wake up! A thunderstorm is brewing, and you're not safe here under this old tree. Wake up, man, and come away!"

There was no response. Suddenly it flashed across Warborough's mind that this was no ordinary sleep; it was the unconsciousness produced by drugs. He might call till the storm beat about his ears, and the man would not wake. The only course was to carry him away bodily, and the sooner he set about it the better.

He hauled the limp, weighty body on to his back and staggered through the rank herbage to the old walls, where he laid him down on the ledge of stone he had chosen for his seat. He renewed his efforts to wake him, and presently Pensax stirred uneasily and opened his eyes.

"Hello! Is that you, Warborough? Where am I? What do you say?"

"I found you out there in the forest asleep under an old tree. Wake up, Pensax; don't go to sleep again,"

he continued, as the other closed his eyes and showed signs of dropping off again. "There's a storm coming on. Don't you hear the thunder?"

The dull rumble increased in volume and was almost incessant. Pensax raised himself into a sitting position.

"Where did you find me?" he asked, as he gazed round in the bewildered manner of one who was only half awake. "Where's my coat and knapsack?" he asked with sudden anxiety, turning his head from side to side and conquering his drowsiness with an effort.

"Under the old tree where you were lying, probably."

"How did I get here?" he asked, now wide awake.

"I carried you on my back."

"Why didn't you wake me there?"

"I tried my best, but couldn't succeed. It was not advisable to wait, for you weren't safe. Look at those trees! That old trunk may come down with a run any minute if the wind increases."

As if in corroboration of what he said another blast set the saplings swaying and bending under the weight of their burden, and some fragments of rotten wood and bark fell.

"I believe you're right! By George! Did you see that?" Pensax exclaimed, as a flash of lightning shot up from the Bowani valley into the heavy cloud above. "We're in for a howler!"

As the roar of the thunder reached them Pensax sprang to his feet and ran towards the place where he had slept. He returned quickly with a coat and rug rolled together and a valise that could be strapped on the back. He opened the roll and put on the coat.

"I suppose this means rain," he remarked. "Where can we find shelter, I wonder?"

"Under these old walls. There's nothing better," said Warborough. "I've been round to look. Let's sit down and make ourselves comfortable, and prepare for the worst. While we wait for the breaking of the storm we'll have some lunch."

CHAPTER XXVI

Pensax looked at his watch. "Half-past one! I must have been asleep four hours at least. I was dog-tired."

"Effect of the sun yesterday," remarked Warborough, casually, although that was not exactly his opinion. Something else had contributed to his drowsiness besides the heat of the sun.

"Not altogether," replied Pensax, with an abrupt frankness. "I smoked one of those cigars sold by the Budagas." He laughed recklessly as Warborough's eyes rested on him with inquiry. "Yes; I was worried. Had very little sleep last night, and wanted to make up for it, as I have a hard day's work before me."

"More prospecting?"

"Yes; more prospecting," replied Pensax, with a laugh. "If you hadn't woke me I should be under the tree still; and a nice drenching I should have had!"

"Probably," assented Warborough, offering him one of the little packets of food that he had brought with him. "Have some lunch."

"I don't mind if I do. I had some biscuits with me, but finished them on the way up."

As they disposed of their tiffin the mist swirled up from the valley, and the clouds above dropped down to meet it. Great whorls of vapour surged round the trees, resting upon their summits and trailing wisps and shreds down to the earth below. Occasionally a violent gust beat down

from overhead, stirring the mist as if with a gigantic spoon. Another current of air came up from the valley below and, meeting the downward draught, joined hands in a wild spiral dance over the trees. The old forest veterans stood firm and unyielding as their foliage whitened under the rough touch of the blast; but the young trees bent and swayed with a circling motion as the wind raged among them. It seemed as though the blasts were playing a wild game of Tom Tiddler's ground with the clouds, chasing them up and down from all points of the compass.

Frequently the thunder pealed, not with the rattle and roar of cannon, but with the vibrations of an earthquake, showing that it still hung about the lower slopes of the valley. Once only was there a response from the cloud above, when an explosion of electricity veined the grey sky with innumerable threads of bluish-white light.

The mist thickened and flash followed flash in quick succession, playing over the trees with a crackling of thunder that contrasted strangely with the voice of the storm in the depths of the Bowani valley, where it had gathered. The lightning was followed by terrific blasts of wind, and then down came the rain in sheets, with a roar that drowned the noise of the hurricane, and linked the rolling thunder in one continuous chorus.

They spread the waterproof rug more closely over their knees, and like the trees bowed their heads to the storm. It was a grand sight—the lashed mist, the beaten trees, the silver rain, and, most majestic of all, the constant streams of electricity, now crackling like riven sheets of brass overhead, now rolling with muffled earth-bound voice below them.

Neither of the men spoke; each met the situation in his own way, and they were not alike. Though it brought silence to both it affected them differently.

Warborough, with his helmet pressed well over his brows, sat motionless, looking out from beneath its brim with steady unflinching gaze upon the wild turbulence of the storm. He watched the birds and insects as they sought closer cover from the wind and rain. He noted the trailing whorls of vapour as, driven by the blasts, they wheeled in circles over the forest. His eye followed the eccentric path of the lightning as it threaded the cloud in a network of rivulets; and his ear distinguished the difference between the roaring of the thunder above and below. The grandeur of it all appealed strongly to his practical mind, and roused his wonder and admiration. The thought that man had obtained the mastery of those very elements rioting round him—that he had compelled even the unknown electric fluid to serve him as fire and water served him, added pride to his admiration. In old days man worshipped and propitiated the physical forces; now he harnessed them, and they were his servants. Warborough felt, too, the exhilaration of the storm; it lifted him from a disciplined world of civilization into one of impressive beauty; and with the uplifting came a sense of gratification in the conviction that he was not the superstitious slave of the elements, but their master. Modern man had surely entered into possession of the earthly kingdom which God had given him.

Pensax, on the other hand, was influenced by a very different emotion. He hated the racket of blast and torrent and thunder; and he shuddered at the noise. He drew up his coat collar till he was entirely enveloped. His chin was buried on his chest, and he closed his eyes so that he should not look upon the unbridled strife of the storm. His highly-strung nervous system made him flinch as the lightning flashed over the forest trees. The crackling thunder that roared simultaneously with a

deafening crash filled him with awe, and roused a dread of death. The howling wind that buffeted the mountain confused and appalled him by its fury.

As Warborough received his impressions through the eye and brain, so Pensax received his through the nerves. The one saw; the other felt. The wild riot of untamed nature was to Pensax something more than a reminder that man had been bold enough to lay a restraining hand on its forces. To him it was the Great Spirit, recognized by King David when he sang of the voice of the Creator speaking in the thunder, Whose hand was behind the tumult. The blood of remote ancestors, men who propitiated the powers of nature with sacrifice and burnt offering, stirred in Pensax's veins; fear and dread filled his heart instead of wonder and admiration; and as he recognized the voice of the Deity he trembled.

The storm raged for half an hour, and then it abated with an abruptness that conveyed an impression of strength rather than weakness. With two or three parting peals the thunder ceased, and the hurly-burly died down. The violence of the rain lessened, and before it stopped entirely the sun burst forth with tropical heat, scattering the wreaths of mist that hung about the trees, and dispersing trails of vapour on the slopes of the valley. Above the mountains the majestic cloud with its gilded head sailed on to regather force and break again on Dodabetta or some other peak.

"That's about the worst storm I've ever been in," remarked Pensax, as he lifted his head and looked out upon the wet earth. He stood up and shook the water from the rug, throwing the rug over the top of the wall to dry. It was not very damp; the wall had protected them from the rain with the exception of their heads. "I wonder if I should have been better off if I had remained under the old tree? By George! look there, Warborough!"

Warborough, whose eyes were upon the clouds to reassure himself that the rain was over, gazed in the direction indicated. The old tree had fallen to the ground at last, and the great trunk lay at full length over the very spot where Pensax had slept. It was not the lightning that had brought it down, but the wind.

"I thought it didn't look very safe. Some of the boughs of the young trees had given way. It was the possibility of an accident of that kind which made me persevere, and in the end carry you off bodily. Next time you take a dose of opium choose a better place for your sleep."

"You saved my life; that's what I have to thank you for," said Pensax, who with the narcotic and the experience of the storm was not altogether himself.

"I don't know about that. I fancy the rain would have roused you if the thunder didn't."

"I was sheltered from the rain as long as the tree stood. I wonder when it came down?"

"Probably with that terrific blast that brought the downpour. Anyway you're safe; so that's all right. Now we can finish our lunch."

They sat down again, and for a time neither spoke. Warborough's eyes were upon the jungle. The birds were emerging from their shelter and shaking their plumage free of rain-drops. Large butterflies that are not to be seen near the haunts of man, flew down from the trees and settled on flower and leaf in the sun, opening and shutting their brilliant wings with a quiver of delight in the warmth.

Pensax was still under the influence of the storm, listening to the mysterious voice that underlay the thunder and the wind. In his imaginative mind the action of the Deity was visible in the fallen tree. As the blast roared a hand had struck the trunk and sent it down. Would it have

spared the tree had he remained there? He thought not. If Warborough had not come he would be lying under the trunk horribly crushed, possibly not killed outright, but held a prisoner until death should release him; for no other way of release was within human means.

"What brought you up here?" he asked presently, looking at his companion with a contraction of the eyebrows.

"I wanted to see the Droog. The morning was fine and it seemed a good opportunity."

They relapsed into silence, which Pensax was the first to break.

"You'll be leaving the hills soon, I suppose."

"Yes," said Warborough, his face immobile and devoid of expression. The habitual blankness was more apparent than usual, and it irritated Pensax.

"Your job is ended," he said, with a touch of aggressiveness in his manner that was not lost upon his listener. "You've been very quiet about it, and on the whole fairly successful as far as the liquor trade is concerned. Periyar is the agent; his master finances the business. You're very close, Warborough; you don't give yourself away with that wooden expression of yours. At first you deceived me. As I told you last night, I thought you were doing films on the quiet for moving picture shows; but I soon found out that you had something else in hand. You were well chosen for your work!"

"Plain speaking, Pensax; but I won't quarrel with you over it. From my point of view I don't consider that I have done anything more than Lutterworth could have accomplished if he had had more time to devote to it. It was easy and simple, too simple to be of much interest."

"You think that your work was limited to that drug business?" said Pensax, looking at him sharply.

"I was not asked to inquire into anything else. Was there anything more that I could have done besides clearing you of implication and putting Lutterworth on the right scent?"

"It was kind of you to clear my name," said Pensax with unmistakable scorn.

Warborough wondered what had upset him. He put his irritation down to the disturbance of the weather. Highly strung natures like his were apt to be affected by an electric storm. He let the remark pass, and said in an even unruffled tone—

"Since you don't object to speaking out, I wish you would satisfy my curiosity about yourself. I know from what I saw yesterday that you are prospecting. Why were you with the soldiers at the old gold-mine?"

"Extracting information of sorts. Those fellows prowl all over the country wherever they are stationed, and they get thoroughly familiar with it. I know most of the places they come from. The liquor they bought of that rascal Periyar loosened their tongues, and I found the talk amusing and interesting. Ask me anything you like. I'm in a reckless humour. Would you like to hear my estimate of myself.?"

"No, thanks," said Warborough, with a smile. "Isn't it about time we made tracks for home? We've a longish walk before us."

He rose from his seat and stretched himself. The sky was once more clear of cloud overhead. He looked at his watch; it was half-past three o'clock.

"I'm not coming with you."

"Oh!" exclaimed Warborough, accepting the statement without comment. He was not at all anxious for Pensax's company. "Then I'll be off."

"Wait a moment; I've something more to say." He paused, and then added abruptly, "It's about Nonia."

Warborough stiffened, and his mouth closed a little more firmly as his eyes rested on Pensax with a searching gaze.

"Look here, Warborough! You have cut me out there. I didn't mean to give up without a fight for it; but things have so happened that I shall be obliged to leave the field open to you. What I am going to say will be said for her sake, and not for yours. I've nothing to thank you for; you've done me more than one bad turn. The last is the saving of my life to-day. Much as I love life I don't want it at your hands."

"Sorry!" murmured Warborough, impassively, and not without wonder at the strange impulsive being who could talk in that fashion.

"Before she can marry you, she will have to go through the formality of getting our marriage annulled."

A sudden light came into Warborough's eyes at the mention of the marriage.

"Can you tell me something, Pensax; something vital that concerns her? I want the truth for her sake——"

"It's all for her sake, the sweetest woman that ever lived!" said Pensax.

"—Tell me, do you know for certain if the woman you married in Africa was a widow? or was her husband alive at the time?"

"She was a widow; I can swear to it, though I didn't choose to tell my uncle so. I let him think otherwise. When I discovered her weakness I don't mind telling you that I did everything I could to get rid of her. Heavens! man!" he broke out passionately. "Do you suppose that I should be sitting here tamely if I knew that Nonia was my wife? For years I've wished that I could prove

that Clara's first husband was not dead when I married her. I'd have given—well, a good deal to be able to do it. He died eighteen months before I met her, and was buried at Johannesberg. I took the trouble to go there and see for myself that everything was right, or rather wrong from my point of view. Nonia will be free to marry whom she chooses as soon as her marriage with me is annulled. I'm glad for her sake—not for yours. I've come as near to hating you as I have to any man. Honestly I'd like to kill you where you stand; not that it would bring me any nearer to Nonia. It's in my nature to want to murder those who cross me. I suppose it is one of the characteristics of an adventurer. I told you yesterday that I was an adventurer. What is more, I knew that you had classed me as such as soon as you took my measure. One word more; if you have any gratitude in your soul, just keep the fact of our meeting up here to yourself. It will be quite easy; no one will ask—not even that old deadhead Lutterworth—if you met Dick Pensax on the Droog; so you are not putting yourself into any difficulty over it."

"All right; I won't mention it. You've relieved my mind immensely," said Warborough.

"And cleared the way for Nonia's happiness; don't forget that."

"I shan't forget it. You won't walk back with me?"

"Not I! I'll find my way home by myself. I've had enough of you. You saved my life for me and put me into your debt, for which, as I said just now, I am not in the least grateful."

"As you please; good-bye, Pensax."

Warborough held out his hand; but the other drew back with a laugh in which there was no mirth.

"No; I don't feel that I can do that either to the man who has cut me out, and who credited me with running a twopenny-halfpenny opium den for those d——d soldiers."

"All right; have it so if you like," said Warborough, evenly.

It was curious how irritable Pensax was. Warborough concluded that the drug he had taken must have affected him as well as the storm. If he had been able to sleep if off without being disturbed he might not have felt the irritation he showed. The best thing Warborough could do was to rid him of his presence, and leave him to recover his balance alone. He leaped down from the masonry on which he and Pensax had been standing and started for his walk home. The air was sweet with the smell of the watered earth and sunbathed vegetation. The heat of the midday was over, and the ground was cool and pleasant to walk upon. His final chat with Pensax had taken more than a quarter of an hour and it was nearly four o'clock.

When he had gone about forty yards he heard Pensax call. The thought sprang into his mind that Pensax had reconsidered his decision to stay behind and wished to join him. He turned and looked back.

Pensax stood on the top of the wall facing him. In his hand he held a revolver with which he covered Warborough.

The action could have but one interpretation. The man's evil passion had got the better of him and he meant to murder him.

There was nothing to prevent him from committing the crime. It would be easy to hide the evidence of his deed in the depths of the Droog forest. Few people passed that way, and no traveller left the path of his free will. A dead body need only be carried a few yards from the track and hidden in the jungle. In forty-eight hours the wild beasts would have done their work, and what they did

not dispose of would soon be buried in the thick undergrowth of the forest. All this and more flashed through Warborough's brain as he stood looking back into the mouth of the revolver.

Warborough was no coward. He remained motionless as though he desired to give his assassin a perfect mark. Not a muscle moved; not a limb trembled; and he maintained a breathless silence. If he had to die, he would die like a soldier with his face to the enemy. He knew that Pensax was a good marksman, for he had heard him say that he had had plenty of practice in Africa. He was not likely to bungle at his task.

How long he stood thus he could not have said. It might have been only thirty seconds; it felt like a lifetime. Suddenly the tension relaxed. Pensax raised his hand and fired into the air, high over Warborough's head. Warborough heard the bullet whizz as it passed.

The incident was strange and unexpected; yet it was in accordance with Pensax's impulsive and emotional temperament; and Warborough was not altogether surprised. How near to death he had been he did not care to think. It was enough to know that the danger was past. Pensax might have been mad for the moment, swayed by a sudden and uncontrollable passion; but as he had spared him deliberately it was not likely that he would change his mind.

After the shot had been fired Warborough remained for a few seconds gazing at Pensax's figure as it stood out distinctly against the afternoon sky. The murderous weapon was still in his hand, which hung now harmlessly by his side.

Suddenly the truth flashed upon Warborough, and he discerned the motive for the action. Pensax had paid his debt coin for coin. As Warborough had saved his

life so he had spared Warborough's ; and now he owed him nothing.

In acknowledgment of the payment of the debt Warborough gave a military salute. Then turning on his heel he continued his journey at the same deliberate pace he had left the fort. As he strode down the hill he heard Pensax laugh ; but the laugh found no response in Warborough's heart.

CHAPTER XXVII

Berringham was once more taking things for granted. Having made up his mind that he would marry Nonia he found it difficult to give up the idea. It took a little time for the fact to penetrate that she did not love him; and to spare him the mortification of a refusal she had stopped the proposal when it was actually on his lips. His was not an impetuous, precipitate nature. He was slow in making up his mind and slow in carrying it out. Fortunately for him he was also slow in giving himself away; and when he discovered that Nonia was unattainable, he was not so much disappointed over the girl herself as over the fulfilment of his desire for a wife. Without any deliberate intention his affections transferred themselves to Pansy; and before long he awoke to the consciousness that she reigned supreme and that Nonia was deposed.

He realized the true state of his sentiments with a curious little thrill of satisfaction. His first choice was a mistake; it had been rectified before it was too late. He wondered if Nonia would notice the change. He hoped she would; and he was not above a further secret hope that she would one day realize what she had lost. The loss was not in his own person. He was modest enough to believe that there were many better fellows in the world than himself. The loss consisted in the closing of the door against Nonia's entry into the charmed circle of his regimental world.

To his simple mind it seemed to be the most desirable world a well-bred woman could wish to enter.

In his precise way he carefully mapped out the future. Profiting by the mistakes he made before, he determined that he would allow no other matter, such as the driving of a motor-car, to distract his attention this time from the main object. Having decided when he would put the momentous question—the place, the day, even the hour—he would go straight to the point and declare his love, following it up by the usual request that she would make him happy for ever by consenting to be his wife. Dear little Pansy! how delightful it would be to see her blush! His pulse quickened as he pictured the tell-tale light that would shine in her eyes, and give him his answer more effectually than any words. He saw himself—always in a diffident chivalrous fashion—drawing her yielding little figure closer; and if the occasion was convenient he would—oh yes! that would be the way to manage it! It would all be easy if he had no car to drive. And she herself would not introduce any disturbing element by suggesting that he should do something ridiculous; feed bullocks with sugar or catch a lively mongoose for her!

The next point to consider was the time. He decided that it should be done on the day of the regimental sports. They were to take place in ten days' time. After they were over he would decoy Pansy away from her mother and sister and learn his fate. Meanwhile he would see as much as possible of the Cotheridges.

A shooting competition for ladies with rook rifles was one of the items introduced into the programme of the sports. As there were only three ladies in the regiment, Mrs. Oswald proposed that the event should be open to visitors as well—and that it should be made known at once to allow of people to practise. As soon as it was announced

there was a rush for entrance. Every one who could hold an umbrella thought herself competent to handle a rifle, and promptly sent in her name. Mrs. Oswald was dismayed. She summoned Major Berringham, and showed him the list.

"Do you realize that with all these entries it will take a whole day to shoot off the rifle match?" she asked, her level brows contracting.

"What are we to do?" asked Berringham.

He was pleased at being consulted, although he was not of much use in initiating. His virtue consisted more of following a good lead and backing it up.

"We can put the match off altogether," said Mrs. Oswald, whose instinct was to take a high hand where the regiment was concerned.

"I am afraid it would cause a good deal of disappointment," replied Berringham. "Can't we think of something else?" He had Pansy and her sister in his mind, both of whom were good shots.

"Shall we limit the entries to ten or a dozen; even then it will take nearly an hour. We mustn't forget that the day belongs to the men. It wouldn't be quite fair to allow the visitors to interfere with their pleasure."

"We might do that," said Berringham, doubtfully. "But there again comes in a difficulty. We should have to select."

"Why not draw lots?"

"We shall still have to face a large amount of disappointment."

"How would it do to appoint a committee, Mr. Bewley and Captain Devon, for instance, to see it through? The competition could easily run alongside of the other events."

Berringham could not agree with her. Divided interests

would not do in any regimental affair. The attention of the company ought to centre on the men, and ought not to be diverted; otherwise the sports might fall flat; to all of which Mrs. Oswald agreed. There was a pause. Suddenly her brow cleared.

"I know! We'll have the shooting here at my house one day before the sports. I'll give the tea; and you and Captain Devon can come and superintend the shooting, if you will be so kind. The best six out of the number shall shoot for the finals on the day of the sports."

"Splendid! What a head you've got, Mrs. Oswald!" cried Berringham, more than a little pleased at the solution of the difficulty. "But put in Bewley instead of me with Devon. I should like to be free."

He was thinking of Pansy. This might be a more suitable opportunity to propose than the day of the sports.

"All right; I'll send out the invitations at once, and the competitors will have time to practise a little beforehand."

They arranged the date and chose a suitable place in the garden for the shooting.

"I shall want any amount of bottles," said Mrs. Oswald, as he was taking his leave.

"I'll speak to the mess butler and tell him to send you a lot."

Berringham got into his car with the intention of being driven straight to Coonoor, that he might tell Pansy and her sister of the arrangement. He wondered if they had a rook rifle with which they could practise; if not he would be glad to lend them one. At the same time he might offer to coach them.

Just as he arrived opposite the club he met Lutterworth coming out. He was riding, and seemed in a hurry. The chauffeur stopped at a signal from the police officer.

"You don't happen to know where Pensax is, do you?" he asked.

"Haven't seen him since he met with that accident on the racecourse. He's out and about again by this time, I suppose."

"I'm afraid he has gone off to his prospecting camp some twenty miles away from here, and I shan't be able to get at him till he comes back."

Lutterworth's eyes rested on the car with an unconscious look of envy. That was the sort of thing Government ought to allow police officers, instead of the cheaper and less effective horse. Perhaps it would come in time.

"Can Warborough help you? He's at the same hotel and may know something of his movements."

"I asked for him and they told me that he also had gone out. Pensax it appeared started before daylight and went, as far as I can gather, to his camp; though they seem very vague about it at the hotel. Warborough undoubtedly went in the direction of the Droog, for I saw his syce. The man has orders to meet his master at the cross road down the ghat."

"Then he can't help you. Can I help by lending the car?"

"If you could, I should be very thankful. Just come here a minute."

Lutterworth dismounted and Berringham joined him. They walked out of hearing of the chauffeur and syce.

"Fact is, I've had a wire in cipher from the commissioner asking me to follow the man's movements, and not lose sight of him. I've written to say that he isn't mixed up in the liquor traffic. If they have got a notion in their heads that he's in it, they're wrong. Anyway, I must carry out my instructions and wire back his exact whereabouts as soon as I can find out. Your offer of the car is

valuable. I couldn't possibly run him down to his camp without it; it's twenty miles away from here."

"You're quite welcome to it; keep it the whole afternoon if you like. I'm going to pay a call or two in Coonoor, and I may finish up at the club. Take it now, and I'll walk on."

"No, no! you shall have my horse."

The change was effected without delay. Berringham asked no questions; but he could not help wondering what was in the wind. He had not heard before of the suspicion that was attached to Pensax, and he was a little shocked. His mind, however, was too full of his own affairs to trouble about those of other people. He rode to Mrs. Cotheridge's gate and told the syce to wait. Turning into the secluded garden that surrounded her house, he stopped under the rose-covered porch that shaded the front door and rang the bell. The door stood open and Ivy appeared before the servant could answer the bell.

"Oh! it's you, Major Berringham! How nice of you to come in like this! Mother is out in one direction, and Pansy in another; and I'm alone."

His face fell, but he accepted her invitation. If he could not see Pansy, he could at least have the pleasure of talking about her to her sister. He sat down in the cool rose-scented room that somehow reminded him of pansies and ivy, and went at once to the subject that was nearest his heart.

"I've just seen Mrs. Oswald, and we've been talking about the shooting competition at the regimental sports."

"How nice! What do we shoot at?"

"Bottles we think will be best, because you're all used to bottles stuck up against your garden walls."

"I'm so glad! It's so delightful to hear the crash of broken glass. Pansy and I have smashed every bottle

on the premises and mother won't let us have any more, she says. She has given us a tough old stone ink-bottle to practice at. It seems to have nine lives like a cat. We've hit it several times, but it only chips and stars. You'd better adopt a similar kind of bottle at the match."

"Not at all a bad idea, Miss Ivy. Have you a good rifle of your own? because, if not, I should be glad to lend you mine."

"Thank you so much, but we have one. Have many people sent in their names?"

"The number is so great that we have decided to arrange for a meeting a day or two before the sports; it would be impossible to shoot off the match in the time allowed on the day itself. Mrs. Oswald is sending out invitations. There is a very good ground to shoot over in her compound. We calculate that it will take the whole afternoon."

"Splendid! then we shan't be hurried!" exclaimed Ivy, enthusiastically.

"The six ladies who head the list will be chosen for a final trial at the sports, and we shall give a consolation prize to the winner of the first match if she is unlucky enough to lose her place in the second."

"How delightful! I wish Pansy was here! She will be so pleased! I'm sure she has as good a chance as anybody."

"Has she gone out for the day?"

"Oh no! The fact is, a cousin has arrived to stay with us, and they have gone out for a walk in Sim's Park."

"Has she come out from home?"

"She! it's a he! and he's a dear! Cousins are so delightful! Don't you think so? So much ground is already covered by the relationship and you drop at once into a friendliness that isn't exactly brotherliness; nor

is it quite like being engaged. It's a cross between the two."

"I haven't any cousins; at least none that I am acquainted with," said Berringham, shortly, and with a dawning antagonism to cousinship generally.

"Poor you! I'm so sorry! It must be a great loss out of your life. I wish we were your cousins," a wish that found an echo in his heart. "Cousin Tom is so nice. I must tell you strictly in confidence that he is quite the best-looking man I've ever seen; and if only I were the elder instead of the younger I should be in love with him myself. As it is I have to take a back seat until I know what Pansy is going to do. I don't mind confessing that I shall have no scruples in cutting Pansy out if I can; but, you know, she is very fascinating, and there isn't much left for me if she gets interested. It's bad luck being a younger sister!" she concluded with a ridiculous little sigh, and a casting up of her eyes that completely imposed upon him. He rose as if to go.

"You're not off yet, are you? Do stay a little longer. Perhaps Pansy and cousin Tom may come in. I should like you to know him; you will be charmed with him; he's such a darling and so nice to us. He kissed us both on arrival just as if he were our brother. Then he said nice complimentary things—specially to Pansy—about how well we were looking, which was not like a brother. That's just the difference I was telling you about. He actually kissed mother as well. I don't think he ought to have done that, do you? I'm sure father wouldn't like it. Pansy will have to speak to her about it."

"If she's his aunt——" began Berringham, rather helplessly; he felt limp and suddenly dispirited.

"Oh, but she isn't! she's his cousin too."

"I suppose it's the custom in some families."

"In nice affectionate families like ours it's the custom for the young people; not the old. Perhaps your family is not like ours, and you don't want to kiss each other. It's all a matter of taste and not in the least necessary; though cousin Tom declares that it is, as it shows there is no ill-feeling."

"Did you say that Miss Cotheridge and your cousin had gone into Sim's Park?"

"Yes; but I expect them back to tea. Won't you wait?"

"No thanks; afraid I can't. I have an engagement at the mess house."

"So sorry you can't stay! I'll tell Pansy and mother and cousin Tom."

She accompanied him to the door, and stood watching him as he walked dejectedly up the path to the road above.

"Silly old dear! Blind old thing! I wonder if that will wake him up? Poor Pansy is beginning to think that he doesn't really care; but he does! I know he does! If that has no effect I shall have to tell him outright that he is trifling with her affections and bringing her down to an early grave; that sounds beautiful! I shall just love to say it! and his eyes ought to fill with tears of remorse. They would if he were in a book; but as he's a real man and not a very 'cute one, he won't think of tears till he gets home; and then very likely he'll spoil it all by sneezing. Oh, what dunderheads most men are!"

She went back to the drawing-room, tucked her feet up on the sofa, and took up the book she had thrown down when she heard Berringham's footstep. Then she laughed.

"I wonder whether the nice old thing will go and look for Pansy, and whether he will want to punch cousin Tom's head? Oh! I do hope he will. It will be so sweet of him!

Cousin Tom will have to dodge out of the way. And Pansy, if she has a grain of sense, will step in between them. Oh! I wish some one would want to punch somebody's head on my account! It would be so lovely!"

Berringham mounted Lutterworth's horse with the intention of riding back to the mess. He did not feel inclined to face the company at the club. The mess with its quiet rooms would be more suitable to sit in and think over the situation. He might arrive at some solution of his difficulty if he had time to consider it in all its bearings. His calculations were upset by the arrival of this cousin, who was not letting the grass grow under his feet. At this very moment he might be presuming on his relationship and repeating the kissing ritual that he asserted was a token of goodwill between cousins.

On his way back he had to pass the entrance of Sim's Park. As he reached the gate he caught sight of Pansy coming out. She was alone! Where could the cousin be? the good-looking objectionable young man, who, according to Ivy, had been so free with his kisses?

He stopped and dismounted, hastily telling the syce to take the horse back to the stable; he would not require it again, as he should walk home. Then he went to meet Pansy. She advanced with a shy look of gladness which set his pulses beating.

"I've just been to your house, Miss Cotheridge, to tell you about the shooting match," he said a little stiffly. Somehow, although not visible, the unknown cousin Tom stood between them.

"I'm afraid you found no one in?"

"I saw your sister, and I told her all about the arrangements."

"The lazy puss! She promised mother she would go to the club and get a game of tennis before tea. I suppose

she was too much absorbed in her novel. You were just going back to Wellington, of course. Don't let me detain you."

No sooner did she show signs of leaving him than he was seized with a sudden panic that she would be lost to him altogether. He felt that he must know something more of this cousin before he let her go. His stiffness disappeared, and he assured her that he was in no hurry.

"Have you time to go as far as the pond with the water-lilies?" he asked. "I want to see if they are in blossom. But I forgot. You have a visitor, and I ought not to keep you."

"Ivy told you that cousin Tom has arrived? We were so pleased to see him. He is mother's cousin; they were girl and boy together, and it is quite delightful to see how pleased they are to meet again after thirty-three years. We chaff mother about her old sweetheart, and threaten to tell Dad that she is flirting. He joined her at the bottom of the hill and they are walking home by the figure of eight. It is a little longer, so I came back this way. I reminded mother that 'two's company, three's none'!"

He listened with charmed ears. As she spoke it seemed as though the sun had suddenly burst forth in all its glory, filling his life with golden light. He did not stop to think what Ivy meant by talking as if cousin Tom was of their own age and standing. All his thoughts were centred on the figure by his side, and his mind was in a most unusual state of disorder. His plans and schemes were blown to the winds by the shock he had received. He was not going to risk anything more, but settle his fate at once out of hand. Astonished at his own boldness, he guided her down the terraces to the right, over smooth lawns and past green glades.

There were very few people about. It was too early.

Closer he drew to her side, putting his arm in hers and clasping the warm soft flesh. They arrived at a little summer-house overlooking the miniature lake. The arm found its way round her waist. He forgot the order in which he had determined to proceed, the declaration of his love, the offer of marriage, and then—the jam. He began with the jam and behaved as though he were ten cousins rolled in one.

It was quite fifteen minutes later that he bethought himself of what he should have said. He tried to speak coherently, but even then he couldn't talk sense; and what was more, Pansy seemed to like the nonsense best. Presently Pansy awoke from her dream of bliss and looked at the little watch on her wrist.

"Oh! how late it is! Past teatime! You must come back and have some tea. Mother and Cousin Tom will wonder what has become of me. I promised to go straight home and order it to be ready for them."

They were met at the garden gate by Ivy. She gave her sister a comprehensive glance and took in the situation at once. Then she expressed a demure astonishment at seeing Major Berringham back again.

"You've been very quick over your appointment at the mess; that's the advantage of having a car. I'm so glad you managed to come back. Now we can introduce you to Cousin Tom." She lowered her voice. "I still think him quite the handsomest man I've ever met; don't you, Pansy?"

"No, I don't," said Pansy, stoutly, as she met Berringham's eyes. "I think"—she made a delightful pause before the name—"I think Hugh is far and away the best-looking man I know."

They had reached the porch and were under the roses. Ivy cuddled up to his side and slipped a hand under his arm.

"You're an old darling; that's what you are!" she whispered to Berringham.

He suddenly realized that his lot was cast in exceptionally pleasant places. It was not till after he returned home that he remembered that he had quite forgotten to declare his love formally, or even to ask Pansy to be his wife; but it did not matter; after what had passed, it seemed that everybody understood everything, and there was no need to trouble further about his programme.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Lutterworth drove off without delay, well pleased to have the car. He was convinced that Pensax had gone to the camp. More from force of habit than from any ulterior design of using the information, he had made a mental note of where the camp was situated as Warborough described his expedition.

The car sped along with a warning hum that cleared the road of pedestrians. Frightened of the devil-carriage that ran without horses, any native who might have been on the road, left it and hid in the scrub-jungle till the fearsome machine had passed. Lutterworth therefore met no chance traveller of whom he might have made inquiries and obtained information that would have saved him his journey.

At the point where the path branched off from the road into a rough riding track he stopped. The car could not cross the open ground, which was uneven and rocky. Lutterworth chafed as he realized the limitations of the motor, and wished now that he had his horse.

He got out, and telling the man to wait, he followed the well-trodden path, turning over in his mind as he walked, what excuse he should give to Pensax for his visit when he found him. It would not do to let the prospector think that he was under suspicion. An hour's rapid marching brought him to the camping-ground.

It was deserted. The temporary huts in which the coolies had lodged were empty. Not a soul was in sight. There was not so much as a dog to bark at him. He could not remember if Warborough spoke of tents; he could see none. Some heavy tools and bits of machinery lay piled in a heap and carefully covered with palm-leaf to protect them from the rain. The open hearths where the coolies had cooked their food were filled with fresh ashes that looked as if they might still be warm.

He searched the country with his glasses for sign of human habitation in the shape of temporary hut or blue smoke from camp fires, but could see none. The district seemed devoid of life except for a few brown birds that twittered among the thorn bushes. He looked for cattle and goats, the small herd-boy who was never far away from his charges, and the prowling fuel-gatherer, the unfailing follower of every camp.

It was no use wasting time. As soon as he had assured himself that neither Pensax nor his workpeople were within sight, he walked back to the car. Another hour was gone and the sun was low on the horizon when he began the return journey. It would be dark by the time he reached Coonoor.

When he was about five miles from home the petrol gave out and the car stopped. In ordering the car Berringham had told his chauffeur, a native, that he was only going to Coonoor to make some calls; and the man had not thought it necessary to take a large supply. Lutterworth asked him what he intended to do; he replied that the only thing to be done was to fetch some oil from Wellington. There was nothing for it but to walk the rest of the way. The car would be quite safe on that deserted road for three or four hours; and there was no danger to be feared in leaving it by the side of the track. If they

met a constable on the way he could be sent to look after it till the chauffeur returned.

Once more Lutterworth set off on the tramp. The sun was down and the night air was cool; but he was tired with his previous exertions, and in addition he was annoyed with the fruitlessness of his quest. The orders he had received had been vague; a less active official would have been content with inquiries only at the hotel. He had been requested to keep himself informed of Pensax's movements without exciting his suspicions. Having no experienced detective on his staff, the spying—for it amounted to that and nothing less—could only be done by himself.

"Why can't they tell me what they want and what they suspect? Probably the Mysore Government is getting nervous about the border line, and I shall be asked to prevent Pensax from crossing it," he said to himself more than once.

He was further delayed by the obligation he felt to go round by the mess house to thank Berringham for the loan of the car and tell him what had happened to delay its return.

Dinner was half over when he arrived, and Berringham was anxious he should come in and have something to eat; but he preferred to get home where his dinner was waiting.

"Did you reach the camp?" asked Berringham.

"Yes; but Pensax wasn't there. The work is apparently closed down for the present. Whether they mean to open out again I can't say. From the plant they have left lying there, I should say it was only a temporary stoppage, and that Pensax would have them all at work again before long."

"I dare say you'll find him at the hotel. Good night,

Lutterworth, sorry you won't have some dinner; you must be hungry and tired after all the walking you've had."

It was nine o'clock when he reached his bungalow. After a late and hurried dinner he went up to the hotel and asked for Pensax, and was told that he was dining out. Had he returned? Yes; the butler believed that he had come back soon after seven, dressed and gone out again, so his servant had said, and he would be late. Lutterworth asked for the servant, but the man had gone to his supper and was nowhere to be found. Then he inquired for Warborough, who was in his room and came out at once. They went into the smoking-room. It was a convenient place to chat in, and they would see Pensax if he returned, as he usually went to his bedroom that way.

"You've been to the Droog, I understand," said Lutterworth, taking out his cigarette case. "Had it fine, I hope?"

"There was a thunderstorm about two o'clock."

"Fine sight when you get the clouds below you as well as above. I've been in the opposite direction."

"Ootacamund? You must have had some rain too, as the cloud moved over to Dodabetta."

"I saw it before I started. No; I didn't go to Ooty, I borrowed the car from Berringham and went out to see the ground where Pensax is prospecting; where you rode with him yesterday."

"The coolies were at work, I suppose; the prospecting is real enough when one sees what they are doing."

"The whole place was deserted, cooly lines empty, and not a creature in sight. As far as Pensax was concerned I had my journey for nothing; motoring isn't all jam, as I found out to-day. Coming back we ran out of petrol, and the car was of no more use than a log."

"What did you do?"

"Walked back the last five miles, which made me late for dinner. Have you seen Pensax this evening?"

"He wasn't at dinner with me. He is very unpunctual, and comes in late or early as it happens to suit him."

"I asked for him just now, and they said he was dining out. He doesn't know many people in Coonoor. He must be with the Honingtons or at Chamra House."

Warborough did not reply. It was quite possible that Pensax might have come in soon after he himself had arrived, dressed and gone out again. There was no horse waiting for him on the ghat road to bring him up; but he could have caught the evening train at one of the stations and have reached Coonoor in ample time to fulfil a dinner engagement.

"I called here just before I went out, to ask if you knew anything of Pensax's movements; but they told me that you left after an early breakfast to get up the Droog if you could. Your syce had returned with the horse and with the order for the second horse to meet you down the ghat."

"Not easy to keep one's movements secret!" said Warborough.

"Unless you choose to pay the price. The native doesn't exist in my opinion who can't be bought!"

"It's a long journey to the top of the Droog; but well worth it when you get to the end."

"You didn't see anything of Pensax, I suppose. I wonder what he did with himself to-day?"

Warborough let the remark pass as a comment, receiving it with his usual blank expression.

"Do you believe that Englishmen were ever imprisoned in the fort at the top of the Droog?" he said after a slight pause.

Lutterworth glanced at him under his eyelids as a sudden thought flashed across his brain. He consented to be led away from the scent, and they discussed the tradition as well as the probable route by which the Mysoreans brought the men to their wild prison on the top of the mountain.

"There are paths known only to the natives that lead down into the Bowani valley; but the Mysoreans must have come from the north by Ootacamund through the old pass that was used before the southern ghat road was made."

Warborough recalled Pensax's criticisms on the alignment of the railway.

"Is the pass still open?"

"For pack cattle and porters if they choose to use it; but the native is quick to avail himself of the advantages of the railroad; and unless they are after a little smuggling of salt and sandalwood, I should say that the old tracks are very rarely used. Besides fever, there are tigers to be reckoned with. The tiger is like a cat; he wanders—walks, as Kipling says of the cat—and you can never be sure of his absence or presence."

Lutterworth rose to go. He stretched his legs, making a grimace as he felt the stiffness of over-exerted muscles already setting in.

"I have some letters to write, so I'll say good night. How long did you stop on the top of the Droog?"

"Till the storm was over. The rain was very heavy and the lightning unpleasantly near at times."

"Where did you shelter?"

"Under the old walls as well as I could; but I got rather wet about the shoulders."

They parted in the verandah, and Lutterworth walked back to his bungalow. He was puzzled. Warborough,

he strongly suspected, had some knowledge of Pensax's movements which he did not choose to impart; though why he should keep it to himself he was at a loss to understand. Did he know anything against Pensax? It was scarcely probable. After all, the request from headquarters had only consisted of an order to keep an eye on the prospector. No reason was given, and no hint thrown out as to whether it was only a matter of trespassing over the boundary of the native state; or whether there was anything of a graver nature in the wind. He could not seriously entertain this last suggestion, since he was now quite satisfied that the prospecting was not a blind for the liquor traffic, with which he was morally certain that Pensax had nothing to do.

Late as it was he summoned his head inspector, and after consultation the wires were set working. Then he wrote letters which were to go by the morning mail; and it was not till the small hours of the morning that he turned into his bedroom. Before putting out the lamp in his office he called to the constable on duty in the verandah.

"Has Mr. Pensax come in?" he asked.

The answer was in the negative.

"I wonder what's up?" said Lutterworth to himself as he tumbled into bed as tired as a dog.

He slept five hours straight off, and might have continued sleeping if his servant had not come in with the early morning tea and the letters.

There was a short and unofficial note from his superior officer, written confidentially and expressing a hope that he had not lost sight of Pensax; but again there was an absence of all details as to the reason of the hope. As soon as he had glanced through his correspondence and dressed, he went up to the hotel and learned what did not surprise him in the least, that Pensax had not returned from his

dinner-party. He asked for his servant. The man was nowhere to be found, and had not been seen since he went to his supper the evening before. Where were the syces? They too were out with the horses. The head butler of the hotel volunteered the information that the two horses were sold immediately after the races to some gentleman in Ootacamund, who arranged to take them over as soon as the master could spare them. They went up to their new owner yesterday. The third was hired; it had gone back to its stable, and the bill had been paid.

As Lutterworth listened the uneasy feeling of irritation increased. Something was wrong. There was a want of confidence on the part of the authorities which he keenly resented. He was not conscious of having done his work badly in the past or of having given them any reason to distrust him. It was not fair. If any special work had to be carried out he was capable of seeing it through. It was most unjust to go over his head in this way and try to bring off a *coup* without his assistance, or by using him only as an untrustworthy subordinate. As he stood in the verandah turning matters over in his mind, the butler waiting to hear if he was required for further cross-examination, Warborough appeared.

"You're just the man I want!" said Lutterworth. "You've heard of course that Pensax didn't come back last night. He was supposed to have gone to a dinner-party; but I don't believe he returned at all."

"I hadn't heard; I don't see much of him. As a rule we only meet at dinner, and not always then. We happen to dine at the same table."

"Look here, Warborough!" said the perplexed Lutterworth, slipping a hand in his arm and moving down the verandah steps into the garden, so as to be out of hearing of any chance loiterers in the sitting-room. "Do you

mind telling me exactly what your orders were when you were sent up here ? "

" To find out how the troops got their liquor. It was in answer to Colonel Oswald's request."

" You were not asked to keep an eye on Pensax and his prospecting ? "

" Certainly not. My work was entirely directed towards the discovery of the breach in military discipline. Prospecting, legal or illegal, doesn't come under that heading ; nor does the breaking of abkarri laws with respect to natives. What the authorities commissioned me to do was to find out how the men got their liquor so that it might be stopped."

" And Pensax's name wasn't mentioned ? "

" Yes, it was ! A few days ago I was asked if he was up here and whether I had seen any of his work."

" Was your answer to be confidential ? "

" They didn't say so. I replied after I had seen the camp ; I said that to the best of my belief he was engaged in prospecting ; that he had evidently thoroughly worked the Nilgiris for the syndicate that employed him, judging from the maps he showed me. I had also seen his licence."

" You don't know where he is ? "

" I don't," replied Warborough, impassively and without hesitation.

" Yet you saw him yesterday ? "

This time Warborough did not ignore the query that underlay the statement. He answered in the affirmative simply and without comment.

" Yes."

" Was he going down the ghat ? "

" I didn't ask him. When I came across him he was resting. I proposed that he should join me, and that we

should walk back to the hotel together. He refused; and so I came on alone."

"He didn't intend to return," said Lutterworth with conviction.

"Possibly; but if you have no information which will authorize you to arrest him, why bother? Government doesn't ask us to think. They do the thinking, and expect us to carry out their orders and report on the same."

"The true military spirit!" commented the Assistant Superintendent, "but that sort of thing wouldn't do in my service, where we've got to think and often act before the orders come."

"You'll hear something in a day or two if there's anything in the wind."

"And get a wigging because I can't lay my hands on the man after being warned that he ought to be kept in sight! If they wanted to have him watched they should have sent me a couple of men—trackers—in plain clothes to shadow him."

A constable approached with a note.

"Excuse me!" said Lutterworth opening it. "By Jingo! Here's a nice racket! Miss Armscote writes that her happy family has been raided, the bear killed and the rest of the animals stolen. She wants me to take it up at once and find the thief."

"Does she write herself?" asked Warborough.

"There's her note." He handed the sheet of paper to his companion. It was in Nonia's own writing. "It's hers all right, and I must go up to Chamra House as soon as I can and see what's the matter. Poor girl! She's fond of that bear. This is the work of that ill-conditioned Hindu, Periyar, unless I'm very much mistaken. I'll have him arrested at once. I intended making the raid on the opium den this very afternoon. It's the military

holiday. I want to catch the men who have been using the place, and they will all be there between three and five. I need not wait till then for the Hindu. I'll have him quietly secured at once."

"Are you going up to Chamra House?" asked Warborough.

"Not till I've seen my head inspector and given my orders. I hope you won't take any blame to yourself, Warborough, if I look for Pensax on the Droog. He is quite as likely to have gone up the hill as down to Mettapollium. There are tea plantations on the slopes of the Droog where he could hide."

"You don't know yet whether he has any reason for hiding."

"That's true enough! I must be off. If you're riding up that way, will you call in at Chamra House and tell Miss Armscote that I am taking action at once, and will come up later in the day?"

CHAPTER XXIX

It was the morning after Warborough's expedition to the Droog. The sun was creeping over the shoulders of the hills and sending its warm rays down on the vegetation, wet with a shower of the night. Fresh roses were opening their petals and the fuchsias springing into flower under its magic touch. Pied wagtails ran along the garden watercourse in search of insects for their young. Butterflies appeared from their secret hiding-places, and the summer's day began.

Nonia was up early as was her wont. She stepped out of the French window of her drawing-room and glanced round with keen appreciation. Nothing escaped her eye. The flowers and birds and insects were her companions. She carried in her hands a bunch of faded flowers. They were deposited on a table in the verandah for the gardener to remove later, when he came to sweep and tidy that part of the garden. She took down her garden scissors from a nail in the wall and picked up an empty basket to hold the spoils. As she moved away from the house Abdul came running up. With a wail of grief he flung himself at her feet.

"Lady! lady! Teddy bear dead! Aiyoh! Pleeser done run away! goat killed! buppalo stolen! All done dead! done gone! Aiyoh! Aiyoh! missie please come and see!"

The boy was followed by the butler and two or three other servants, who had forsaken their work to hear the sad tale as often as any one could be found to repeat it. She turned to the head boy.

"What is Abdul saying?" she asked.

"That the beasts are dead or gone, missie."

"Impossible! Where is Houssain?"

"He is at their sleeping-place."

She put down her basket and scissors and went swiftly to the spot where her happy family was lodged. A sad sight met her eyes. Poor Teddy bear lay stiff and cold outside his kennel. The door of Tiglath Pileser's den stood open, and the hut was empty. A pool of blood marked the spot where Capers, the goat had been slain; and Basan, the young Toda buffalo was gone. The solitary surviving member of the happy family was the kite with the broken wing. He could scarcely be looked upon as a pet; he was only a temporary lodger waiting till the disabled limb was fit for use. Nonia walked straight to the box in which Ricki-ticki-tavy lived. It was empty. She turned to Houssain, who stood scowling and silent, by the dead bear, with Pishasha at his side.

"Who has done this?" she asked.

"Can't say, missie."

Abdul with streaming eyes came closer and spoke.

"It is that cursed dog of a Hindu! May Allah let him burn to ashes! My father here knows that it is his doing," he said indignantly.

Houssain did not deny the statement, but kept silence.

"Is it true, what Abdul says?" asked Nonia of the old sepoy.

"Maybe so," he replied.

"Why should he do this?" she asked, pointing to the body of the bear. "Poor Teddy has never done him any

harm. Now if it had been the monkey I should not have been surprised."

"Pishasha sleeps with me and so he was safe," said Houssain. Then he added under his breath with set jaw, the words coming through his teeth, "May Allah curse him, and send ten thousand devils to torment him!"

"Why has he been so cruel as to kill the innocent bear?" demanded Nonia, distressed and puzzled.

She appealed to Houssain, and the old man threw off the restraint he had exercised with so much difficulty and burst into passionate speech.

"He has done it through spite towards me; to stir up the missie's anger and cause her to dismiss her slave. The beasts were in my charge, and the care of them gave me my wages. If there were no beasts this old servant would have nothing to do. They are all gone, and my work is gone with them. I can be of no use to missie any more."

"It is outrageous! abominable! My poor Teddy! I wonder how you were done to death? Is there any mark on the body?"

"The bear was poisoned," said the butler at her elbow. "The goat has been killed for curry. The buffalo will be sold by the thief. Also the mongoose."

Nonia turned away, her eyes filling with hot indignant tears. She stopped as a thought struck her and moved back again. It was impossible to leave Teddy lying there dead; he must be buried.

"Tell the gardener to dig a grave in a corner of the lower garden at once; and Houssain, you see that the body is properly put in and covered over."

"Yes, missie," said the sepoy, once more silent and moody.

"Butler! send down to the police station and give

notice of the theft. I can't prove the poisoning of the bear; but I can prove the robbery of the other animals. Stay! I will write to Mr. Lutterworth myself."

"It is all the doing of that black pig Periyar!" wailed Abdul, kneeling by the body of the bear. "Oh, my brother! he has poisoned thee! May he suffer torments in Gehenna for ever!" he added in his own tongue.

The boy laid his head on the black fur and sobbed as though he had lost a real brother. His long brown hand hovered over the glazed eyes of the poor beast with an even movement, as though he were patting the creature into gentle slumber. Nonia stood looking down at him with more sympathy than she was aware of. Her own eyes grew dim, and she felt as though she too must break down if she stayed to watch his grief.

"Syce!" she said. "Have the ponies been fed?"

"Yes, lady; they have just now done eat their morning gram."

"Put the saddle on the riding horse." She turned to the butler. "I will go for a ride, and while I am away get the bear buried; have the goat's house cleaned, and let the place be put in order before I see it again."

She went indoors and put on her riding habit. By the time she was ready the pony was at the door. The butler, mindful of her welfare, was waiting with a glass of milk.

"Thanks, butler; I shall be back to breakfast by ten," she said as she took the milk.

She felt that she could not stay to see the last of her pet. To reach the place where she had ordered his grave to be dug they must carry him through the garden, where, if she continued her morning occupation among the flowers, she must see the funeral party, and perhaps hear the ring of the native spade used in turning the earth. She would

go to the foot of the cliff and leave the pony with the syce, while she climbed up to the heights above. There she would get a breath of the fresh invigorating air that would disperse the cobwebs of vexation and anger. She shook the reins and the pony started off willingly enough. She felt better after a gallop ; and when the road grew steeper she let the animal walk at its own pace, which gave the syce time to catch her up.

Her thoughts passed from the unfortunate happy family to Warborough. She had not seen him to talk to since she learned from him on the racecourse that Pensax was practically unhurt ; and then nothing had passed between them but those few words. She continued to live in uncertainty as to her true position, and at times she felt it to be almost insupportable. Occasionally she was tempted to write to Pensax and beg him to tell her the truth if he knew it. She would have done so had she been able to trust him altogether. As it was she dared not put herself still further in his power by so much as hinting that she might be his wife. It would encourage him to claim his rights at once if he thought they were legal. Possibly he was in ignorance of his first wife's antecedents, and believed in her widowhood previous to her marriage with him in Africa. On the other hand, if he had suspected or known that his first marriage was invalid, would he have waited till Clara's death to renew his advances to Nonia ? It pointed to a belief on his part in the validity of his first marriage. Long might that belief remain was her earnest prayer.

Warborough had promised to write to Colonel Tredmere asking him to make every inquiry he could with as little delay as possible ; and to cable a reply that would set their minds at rest, and put an end to the suspense which was over-shadowing Nonia's life and robbing it of

all its happiness. She must be patient until the answer came.

During the last ten days she had kept away from the club and from all society gatherings where she might meet Warborough. Had she known it, she need not have feared an encounter. He too absented himself from the places where she might be, for the simple reason that he felt the constraint that had sprung up between them to be more intolerable in her presence than in her absence.

The morning was cloudless. All trace of the storms of yesterday had vanished. The mimosa was opening fresh balls of yellow fluff and shaking off the clinging rain-drops from its sea-green foliage. The humble roadside plants had put on a beauty of their own after the night's bath and were free of dust. Tiny yellow flowers shone like flakes of gold among the grass, and blue specks showed where the speed-well lifted its spike of modest blossom. The vegetation was of the mountain and not of the tropical plains.

Nonia arrived at the foot of the cliff where Warborough had seen the apparition. In the broad light of day there was nothing forbidding or ghostly about the crag. On the contrary, it seemed rather to invite than to repel, and to promise the reward of moorland breezes on the top. At that early hour no one was on the road. The toiling carts that sometimes came that way would appear later. The Budagas were at work in their fields on the lower slopes, taking every advantage of the rain of the evening before, and were not visible.

She dismounted and left the pony in charge of the syce, telling him to wait till she returned; which would not be for half an hour, perhaps more, as she intended to go to the top of the cliff. She took the path into the ravine that ran up by the side of the precipice to the moorland

above. The jungle grew thick in the sheltered gully, and the air was still, except for the rustle of leaves high above her head. The forest had no charm for her this morning. It spoke of the animals she had lost. They loved the leafy bowers, the hidden recesses, the grey boulders and the rugged trunks of the trees on which they could sharpen their claws. She recalled Teddy as he clawed the soft leaf mould and thrust his long nose into it in search of a grub or beetle; and Tiglath Pileser as he sniffed the air for the hidden jungle sheep. The memory of the dead bear and the weeping Abdul, his inconsolable mourner, impelled her to swift action. It seemed the only way of subduing her burning rage that would not be quenched. Her servants openly named the perpetrator of the deed. Her own suspicions pointed in the same direction. There was reason for the hatred that existed between the Muhammadan and the Hindu. In addition to the race hatred, jealousy had always smouldered in the hearts of both, ready to burst into flame on the slightest provocation. The theft of the mysterious horn, of which Houssain had accused the Hindu, was the latest trouble. She knew nothing of the missing object itself; but she was aware of the fact that Houssain attached great value to it and grieved over its loss; it was the cause of a very bitter quarrel that added to the bad blood between them.

Up and up she went through the jungle. Gradually it lost its character of scrub and merged into something nobler and more of the primeval nature. Large trees sprang from the rocky hillsides where man could never have planted them, and sent up long stems crowned with thick foliage. Ferns, wild ginger, brambles, laurels, and guavas covered the rough ground with a luxuriant tangle; and the ubiquitous creeper linked branch with branch, and bush with bush. The jungle would have been

impassable were it not for the well-trodden footpath that wound up the ravine.

Once she was under the impression that she was being followed by some animal, and her thoughts flew to the panther cub. She stood still and listened. The crackling of twigs ceased. Then she called, using the cry of the native when he brings food—"Bah! bah! bah!" If it had been Pileser he would have responded. She had no fear of meeting a tiger or a full-grown leopard so near Coonoor and civilization. It was probably a timid jackal moving away at her approach, nothing more. She resumed her walk and climbed on, coming out at last on the moorland.

As the keen mountain air met her she stopped and drank in its freshness, filling her lungs. It seemed to enter her blood and course through her veins, driving out the fever of anger and hatred, and clearing her mental atmosphere. After all, they were only brute-beasts; it was not right to mourn for them as though they were human beings, much as she loved them. It was the fate of pets to meet with a violent end; it had been her experience always.

Nonia knew enough of the jungle to take the precaution of marking the spot where the path ended. The way may appear plain enough in the forest, but the exit once lost sight of is difficult to find unless the traveller has some land-mark to guide him. To make matters quite safe, she deposited a piece of note paper in a conspicuous place with a bit of rock to secure it from being blown away by the wind.

She strolled off with her back to Coonoor and her face to the wide open country where no sign of life was visible. There was a faint track that might have been made by the Toda's cattle. It ran parallel with the edge of the cliff. She had never before been as far. The solitude, the open

highland, the great boulders of rock standing like fragments of old walls among the trees were in harmony with her present mood, and had a soothing influence on her nerves. Even the wind that swept over the top of the hills and beat against the wall of forest, rustling the leaves, but never penetrating below those wondrous domes of foliage, seemed kind and sympathetic in its reviving power. Involuntarily she responded to the welcome of the hills and raised her arms, as though she would have taken the spirit of the mountains to her heart. She was conscious of a feeling of relief in having escaped, if only for an hour or so, from the world, which contained a Periyar on one hand and a Dick Pensax on the other.

At the thought of Dick her brow clouded again. When he made love to her in her own flower-scented drawing-room, or in the warm shades of her garden, she had realized the fascination of his soft speech. It had moved her in spite of herself. It was not convincing; nor was it sufficient to shake the decision she had formed; but it revived the dead past. She was sorry for him; pity for a bygone lover is a dangerous quality, and she knew it. There had been a time when she had given him her whole heart unreservedly. He was her first love, and whatever happened in the future the romance of the past would remain.

In her pity she was inclined to regret her inability to offer the gift again. The time was past and circumstances were altered. Another had entered her life, and it was no longer in her power to love a man of Dick's character. She wanted something stronger and better, a deeper nature capable of responding to her greater love.

Her thoughts passed from one to the other, and she remembered the evening of the ball, Dick with his songs of love and butterfly manner faded off the horizon, and Warborough took possession of her; rightly or wrongly

he inspired her with a new love that was like a young giant in its unknown capacity for growth. The attraction of the stronger nature was irresistible; and the hot blood raced through her body as she gave rein to fancy. Alone with the mountain and forest, the wind and the blue sky, she cast aside restraint and let fancy lead her whither it would. A soft light rested in her eyes, as visionary little people gathered round her knees and clung to her skirts; a happy family that could not be dispersed and destroyed by the malevolence of a spiteful Asiatic.

But was she free to dream such dreams? asked prosaic reason, as soon as reason could make its voice heard by the dreamer? If she were not free—? if she were tied to Dick—? The rosy vision that so often sprang unbidden before her mental sight vanished; the warm glow of a great love, maternal as well as wifely, was smothered and crushed down lest it should prove lawless. It was as though the afterglow had faded and the world was seen in the grip of the death glow that followed. If she were bound to Dick—she would sooner remain as she was, and let her unconscious furred and feathered pets share the love that should be bestowed elsewhere.

CHAPTER XXX

Nonia had walked some distance with unobserving eyes, taking no heed of the time, and how it was passing. Instinctively she kept to the track that hugged the edge of the hill, and she moved quickly, more quickly than she was aware of.

The forest came to an end, and she noted the solitary tree standing above the cliff. Beyond the precipice the jungle began again, the trees rising among huge fragments of rock half buried in luxuriant vegetation. It was all new to her. For some unaccountable reason she had never been so far along that particular line of country. Another unusual feature of her walk was the absence of an escort. It was rare indeed that she was allowed to wander by herself outside the boundary of the grounds. Houssain, whatever he might be doing, invariably put aside his work to fulfil the duty of body-guard. To-day she went off without him, having given him a distinct order to execute in her absence. She was pleased to be alone in her present humour. She could follow the line of her thoughts uninterruptedly and without restraint.

In complete ignorance of the geography of the moorland Nonia arrived at the entrance of the old gold-mine. She stopped, attracted by the likeness it bore to the outer walls of an old castle. The path leading into it through the narrow way between the rocks was well defined from the traffic of many feet.

She glanced round the horizon to her right wondering if any Toda cattle were browsing near. She had no wish to encounter a semi-wild buffalo with only an imp of a child to control its movements. Far and near the country was deserted. Not a living creature was in sight, nor could she see any sign of human habitation. Without a moment's hesitation she passed through the narrow opening. A little exclamation of surprise escaped her lips as she looked round and recognized its similarity to the keep of a medieval castle. So like did it seem that she could picture the armed guard as they paced along the top of the walls.

Her eyes missed nothing; the great rocks, the clinging vegetation, the trees sheltered from the blasts of the moorland sufficiently to clothe themselves in a wealth of foliage; the long pendant trails of elephant creeper that might have been combed, so regular was its leafage, the patches of green fern that filled the crevices in the rocks, the blotches of grey and orange and russet lichen that enriched the colouring of the dark gneiss. Where the morning sun touched the rock, birds fluttered and twittered, hunting the wary insects; the tree-loving green and black butterflies, as strong on the wing as the feathered tribe, flew straight up from the branches into the azure of the sky.

A little yelping cry startled her. She brought her eyes down from the high walls of the castle keep to a low bungalow; to her surprise and joy she caught sight of Rikki-tiki-tavy, her lost mongoose, sitting in the open window. The little creature recognized her and again uttered his sharp plaintive call. He moved restlessly along the ledge as though he would come to her if he could.

She ran towards the window with an answering call, and looking through, found that he was tied by the leg to a deck chair that stood under the window. The string

was too low for her to be able to reach it from where she was. She turned to find the door, which on this occasion stood open ready for its afternoon guests, and entered. The room was set out with similar chairs and a few small camp tables. She did not stop to look at the strange and unexpected signs of civilization, but hurried to her pet. The string was untied, and Ricki to his unmistakable delight was once more in his mistress's arms. He showed his pleasure by snuggling into her neck and putting up his cold nose to her cheek. She could feel the gentle touch of his sensitive whiskers, as he assured himself again and again that it was his beloved mistress. He was very hungry ; and in his selfish heart he knew that her presence meant plenty of food and a warm nest to sleep in again. Seating herself in the chair, she abandoned herself to the pleasure of purring over her recovered pet.

" My little darling ! I thought you were lost ! You shall sleep in my room for the future. I must take better care of you. It was my fault that a bad man came and stole you. I wonder if it was Periyar ? What a pity it is that you can't speak and tell me all about it ! "

The sound of a footstep fell on her ear. She looked up with a start and recognized the Hindu. He came up to where she was sitting carrying something in his hand, and stood over her with an evil expression in his eyes. At the sight of him her anger rose. She covered the soft body of the mongoose as if to protect it from his pilfering fingers, and sitting up she spoke in a stern voice.

" What is the meaning of this, Periyar ? Why did you take my little Ricki ? and was it you who poisoned poor Teddy ? How dare you do such a thing ? "

" It was Houssain who did it, lady, not your humble slave Periyar," he said sullenly.

She looked at him severely, and his eyes shifted as though

he could not face the question that was in her searching gaze.

"You are not speaking the truth. I don't believe you. Houssain loves me far too much to hurt one of my pets."

"He is angry because the missie is too kind to the bear," he replied, speaking abruptly and without politeness. "Abdul put poison in the bear's rice last night by Houssain's orders." Then seeing incredulity on her face he added with impudent boldness: "I heard him give the order."

"It's no use talking like that," she said indignantly. "I know Houssain better than to believe that he would do such a thing."

"The sepoy is a very bad man. Missie doesn't know everything. How many times has he tried to kill me? Four times and more. He ought to be in prison."

"He has never once tried to hurt you!" she replied, keeping down her wrath with difficulty. "And as for prison! it is you yourself who will have to go to prison! The truth will soon be made plain. I have already sent to the police station to tell them about the robbery of the mongoose and goat and buffalo. You may keep your tale for Mr. Lutterworth and see if he will believe it!"

At the mention of the police the Hindu's face bore an ugly expression. He had more than one reason for wishing to keep out of their hands. They had awkward ways of inquiring into all sorts of matters not directly concerned with the case. Up to the present he was under the impression that he had kept the secret of the opium den in the gold-mine. Now that Miss Armscote had found her way there, it would no longer be a secret. As soon as she got back to Chamra House she would send a message to the Assistant Superintendent of police, who would arrest him at once.

The man stood glowering at her with his drug-inflamed eyes, his evil mind working rapidly as to the best means of silencing her. She regarded him as a servant to whom reproof should be administered if necessary. She continued to fondle the mongoose, giving it most of her attention. As she passed her hand over its soft fur her anger died down, and she had more control over herself.

"What is this place and who comes here?" she asked in a milder tone than she had used when she threatened him with the police.

"No one comes here, lady," he replied morosely.

"What are those chairs for if the place isn't used?"

She looked up at him with a new suspicion as he replied that he was storing them for a gentleman at Wellington who was going to give a party, a picnic the master called it, in a few days. She glanced at the little tables and the shabby old deck chairs and then at him as he stood there shifting uneasily from one foot to the other.

"I know! It's of no use for you to invent any stories. This is the place where the soldiers come to drink! This is the place the police are hunting for! You try to frighten them away with ghosts and hyæna cries which you make through that horn." Her eyes rested on the thing he held and a sudden inspiration shot across her brain. "That is the horn you have stolen from Houssain! Another matter for the police to inquire into!"

"You are wrong, lady. It is my horn. I bought it of an English soldier who was going back to England. I call the Budagas with it when I want help to get everything ready for the picnic."

She laughed and her laugh irritated him more than any words she had spoken. A native can bear rebuke and abuse, but ridicule "puts fire," as he calls it, in his breast.

"Child's talk! You don't think that I am going to believe such nonsense," she said.

"It is missie who is talking child's talk," he said roughly and in a manner that offended her.

"We shall see what sort of talk it is when Mr. Lutterworth comes. I shall go home now and send for him, if he hasn't already arrived to see how you have destroyed my animals."

She made a movement to rise from the low deck-chair on which she sat. As she did so the Hindu took a step forward and placed a heavy hand on her shoulder so that she was unable to get up.

"Before missie goes she must promise to say nothing of the picnic chairs and this place."

"I shall promise nothing of the kind!" she cried, now thoroughly angry. "What are you doing, Periyar? you are forgetting yourself! Stand off at once and let me go!"

"To tell the police? no, missie; not unless missie will give me the diamonds that the ayah says missie wears always round her neck lest the ayah should steal them."

"How dare you talk like that! Get away and let me go home! You shall certainly be punished for this!"

She dropped the mongoose and began to struggle. Even now she was more angry than alarmed. She could not bring herself to believe that he intended real mischief. He was trying to frighten her, and she was not going to be frightened. She seized his arms to wrench herself away from under his grip, but they were like iron in her hands. The only effect was to cause him to tighten his hold; and one hand crept to her throat. The long bony fingers fumbled with the fastening of her collar, and she felt them cold and clammy against the warm flesh of her neck. Now she understood his intentions. He was going to take her

diamonds—if he could get them; but she was not going to part with them, if she could help it. Again she struggled, this time with desperate strength, and as she began to realize that she had very little chance of overpowering him, for the first time something like fear entered her heart.

The other hand that held her down moved to her neck, and with desperate effort he wrestled with the studs and hooks that were a mystery to him. Taking the dress in both hands he wrenched it open. She screamed for help.

There was small hope of any human being hearing her cry. Even if it reached the ears of any one but an Englishman, it would be put down to the terrible ghost of the cliff, and not to a woman in real distress. Like a flash of lightning the gravity of the situation suddenly presented itself to her quickened perceptions.

It is strange that in moments of great danger the veriest trifle obtrudes itself on the notice. She was acutely conscious, as the man leaned over her, of the strong smell of drink and garlic that poisoned the atmosphere. She felt that she could not bear it; and to get away she again struggled violently, loathing and desperation being the spur to her efforts.

His fingers once more closed round her throat and choked the scream she would have uttered again and again, if she could. She was conscious that he meant something more than robbery with violence. He intended to silence her for ever. The compression round her throat increased; she was unable to breathe. The blood sang in her ears; her eyes seemed as if they would burst, her tongue protruded between her teeth. She tried to call for help, but could not utter a sound. Frantically she writhed in that iron grip, tearing at the hands which held her till she broke the skin and set the blood flowing. In his mad rage

he did not feel it. He had but one object in view, and that was to squeeze the life out of her; and he seemed in a fair way to succeed.

Gradually her strength failed, and a deadly sickness came over her. Was this the beginning of death? she wondered as she ceased to struggle.

Suddenly above her head appeared a long hairy arm, the arm of a monkey. The owner of it was hidden from her sight by the wall of the bungalow. The Hindu, whose eyes were fixed on her face, looking for the signs of death, did not see it. A black hand grasped a knife which was jabbed with a vicious dig into the back of the fiend who stood over her. Again and again was the knife driven in, as the pointed piece of wood was driven into the gourd. The hold on her throat relaxed. Her assailant fell heavily forward. She summoned up sufficient strength to push him away, and he rolled on to the floor with a terrible groan. A fierce simian scream rang in her ears as Pishasha leaped through the window on to the prostrate body of the Hindu, biting and tearing at the unconscious man in a paroxysm of ungovernable rage.

Then Nonia fainted.

When she came to herself she was lying by the roadside where she had left her pony. The pony and syce were gone, and Houssain was supporting her head. As she opened her eyes he put a cup made of green leaf to her lips. The water revived her; but she still felt sick and faint. The feeling was not lessened by the sight of Pishasha secured to a tree close by. He was a ghastly object, his coat was stained with blood, and he was chattering with rage. As she moved he broke out into a scream.

"Peace, little brother, peace!" said Houssain soothingly.

The monkey looked at him pathetically and then touched

his stained fur with a delicate hand as though he would ask the reason of it all.

"Where is Periyar!" said Nonia faintly.

"Up there among the rocks, missie," replied Houssain. He took her handkerchief which he had found in her pocket and bathed her forehead. "He is a very bad man." He controlled himself with an effort, instinctively knowing that she must not be excited.

"Is he dead?" she asked, as memory came back with increasing vividness.

"Pishasha done kill, stabbing him many times."

"Yes!" she said with a shudder. "I saw him strike with the knife, and I heard Periyar groan, then I fainted."

"That Periyar is a very wicked man. He tried to murder missie. If Pishasha had not come just then, missie would have died. Good Pishasha! he saved missie's life."

"How did he find me?"

"After missie rode away I followed with Pishasha. When I came to the place where the pony and syce were, the syce said that missie had gone up the hill. Then I tell Pishasha to run on before and look after the missie. He understood and made haste, running faster than poor old Houssain could go. He was only just in time. After he had done killed that devil I came and carried missie away."

Nonia glanced at the monkey with a curious feeling of mixed gratitude and loathing.

"Wipe the blood off him, Houssain. He looks so dreadful. I am sure that he is very unhappy though he doesn't know what he has done."

"Mustn't clean till police have seen."

"Where's the syce? I left him here. I think I could ride home. I feel a little better."

"I sent him and the pony home, and told him to bring

the other pony with the carriage. Also I ordered him to tell the butler, who will send word to the police."

Nonia raised herself and released the arm of her faithful servant. She found that she had been lying on the pony's horse-cloth. Houssain had made her as comfortable as he could; and the syce before leaving had brought water from a stream, filling two or three improvised cups that the native knows how to make out of green leaves.

Houssain went to a bush at a little distance and returned with the mongoose. He placed Ricki in her arms. As the little creature nestled once more in her neck and she felt the soft touch of his inquiring whiskers, she burst into tears. The old sepoy nodded his head. Good! Tears in a woman were good. They washed away fear and pain, and like the shower over the mountain would be followed by the sun.

CHAPTER XXXI

Warborough lost no time in starting for Chamra House to carry Lutterworth's message. He ordered his horse to be saddled, and mounting it rode away at once. As he passed under the heliotrope fence of the Hillgrove Hotel, Berringham's car came gliding down the hill. He was driving it himself. He pulled up.

"Good morning, Warborough. I'm on my way to Mrs. Cotheridge's. The girls and a cousin they have staying with them are going out with me for a drive. They will have breakfast with me at my bungalow. Will you join us if you have nothing better to do?"

Berringham was overflowing with happiness, and wanted to make others as happy as himself. Warborough refused the invitation, pleading special business that would take him in another direction. He was about to ride on when Berringham leaned towards him from the car and spoke in a tone that was meant to be confidential.

"I say! I've a bit of news for you. Perhaps you can guess," he said, unable to keep it to himself.

"Got a transfer with promotion?"

"No; try again."

"Long leave home? lucky fellow!"

"Yes; I hope so; and I shan't go alone. I shall have a companion."

"Lucky fellow again! Who is it? is it a secret?"

"It's Miss Cotheridge. We only settled it yesterday."

"Best congratulations! But I mustn't keep you; you're off there just now."

"No hurry. I'm before my time. Yes; I am a lucky chap!" said Berringham, beaming over the rosy prospects of the future. After all! the plans, so elaborately mapped out when he contemplated making Nonia his wife, were once more within reach. He would be able to carry them all out: marry and go home on leave; do the Riviera; see a little of London and get some grouse shooting in Scotland. He went over it all in detail, and would have continued another ten minutes if Warborough had not shown signs of restiveness. He was in a fidget to escape. He managed it at last and rode off at a hand gallop.

He was met at the door of Chamra House by Miss Madersfield. She had dressed hastily and much earlier than her custom, and she was inclined to resent the circumstances that had flurried her in this unusual manner.

"Nonia is out," was her greeting. "That is to say, I think she is out for I have not been told anything. I have to discover things for myself."

"I hear there has been trouble in the happy family."

"They are all dead and gone. There is nothing but the kite left. However, it is only what you may expect. Byron wrote lines on his dear Grizelle—it was Byron, wasn't it?"

"I think it was a gazelle," ventured Warborough, leaving the authorship alone.

"That's what I said. It was the name of some pet animal, I take it, that died or was killed. He said something about loving it, and it was sure to die. I hope Nonia will take what has happened as——"

"Are the animals all dead?"

"The bear is dead, stone dead. When you come to think of it, we ought to be very thankful that he is gone;

although I wouldn't like to say so to Nonia. A full-grown bear loose in the garden is worse than a dozen tom-cats. If I had my way—— "

Warborough's patience was ebbing fast. He ventured to interrupt, excusing himself as he did so.

" Can you tell me where I can find Miss Armscote ? I have a message for her from Mr. Lutterworth."

" She may be at the burying of the bear. By-the-bye, I think the butler said she was going out riding, whether before or after the bear's funeral I can't say. Lately she has refused to go into Coonoor, and has been riding up the hills instead of down. She likes to go alone, but Houssain or the watchman follow to see that she is safe ; though what harm could come to her I don't know. The way girls go about—— "

" Excuse me, I must find Miss Armscote," said Warborough, lifting his hat and walking away towards the place where the animals were kept.

It was deserted except for the solitary kite, which gazed at him severely as though he were responsible for all the ills that had befallen the unfortunate members of the happy family. The butler seeing him there joined him, and gave a full description of the havoc that had been wrought, repeating the various theories concerning the perpetrator. Suspicion seemed to centre on Periyar, the Hindu.

" Was Periyar seen near the animals last night ? " asked Warborough, as he walked back to the stable where his horse waited.

Before the man could reply Miss Armscote's syce ran in dragging the pony by its bridle. He put his hands together as his eye fell on Warborough, and with breathless speech said—

" Please, sir, missie very sick. Some one badly hurting."

" What's that ? " said Warborough, sharply. " Where

is she? Speak, you idiot! Where is she and what has happened?" he continued, as the man stammered and then dropped into lamentations.

The butler took him by the arm and shook him, giving him a cuff on the head which stopped his wailing.

"Tell the master where the missie is, or he will have you put in jail for hurting her," he said in the vernacular.

The syce was more at home in his own language, and his speech flowed freely enough as he poured forth the story, which the butler repeated in English.

"Our missie, he says, has been hurt. She went for a walk up in the jungle near the devil's rock. Houssain found her. He is looking after her. The monkey is covered with blood and the missie is lying by the roadside same like dead."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Warborough, mounting his horse and riding off without waiting to hear more.

He went at full speed, pressing his horse to its utmost; and arrived at the spot where Nonia was sitting, the mongoose clasped in her arms and Houssain standing by her with a sympathetic troubled expression, as the tears streamed from her eyes. Warborough was off his horse and kneeling at her side in a second.

"What is it? what has happened, Nonia? Are you hurt?" he asked passing an arm round her.

She looked up at him through her tears. Her hold on the mongoose loosened and it crept away to play in the grass. Houssain, seeing that his services were no longer required, laid his hand on the string attached to Ricki's leg, and tethered the little creature again to a bush.

"Who has hurt you?" asked Warborough once more, as the hysterical sobbing exhausted itself and she was able to speak.

"It was that dreadful Periyar! He attacked me in an

old bungalow on the top of the mountain and tried to steal my diamonds. I resisted, and then he began to strangle me. Oh! it was awful!"

"The brute! He shall be punished for this!" said Warborough.

She put her hand to her neck. "The diamonds are gone! Then he did get them!"

"The thief! We'll catch him and make him disgorge!"

"He is dead! I saw him killed just as he was trying to kill me," she said with a hysterical gasp.

He felt her shudder as the memory of that terrible scene returned with fresh vividness.

"How did he die?" he asked.

"Pishasha killed him. I saw him do it with a long knife. He leaned in at the window. His arm and black hand came over my head and struck at Periyar as he bent over me when I was lying in the deck chair."

"Impossible! you must be mistaken," said Warborough, who recognized the bungalow in the old gold-mine. Nonia must have entered the house and sat down in the chair that he had seen under the window.

"No! no! it is true! Look at Pishasha!"

He had had no eyes for any one else but her. At her bidding he turned and looked at the blood-stained monkey. The sight gave even him a slight shock. He rose to his feet and went to Houssain, who stood at a little distance holding the horse and patiently waiting till he should have leave to go.

"Is this true what the missie tells me?" he asked in a low voice.

"I think so, sir. The monkey followed missie up the hill, and I followed the monkey. Pishasha went faster than I could go, and he was just in time. In another

minute that black devil of a Hindu would have killed our missie; and what would the colonel sahib have said to his servant Houssain?"

"You too saw the monkey kill Periyar?" said Warborough, recalling the fact that a feud existed between the two men.

"I did, sir," responded Houssain, firmly and without hesitation.

"Where did he get the knife?"

"He must have picked it up outside; it was like Periyar's knife that he carried in his belt."

Their eyes met, and for a short space there was silence.

"You think the police will believe it?"

"When they see the monkey; and when they hear the missie's story," he replied confidently.

"Did you leave the man there?"

"Yes, sir; the missie looked as if she was dead. What could I do but bring her away as quickly as possible to a place where I could get water? She remained like dead a long time."

"And the man is there now? Are you sure he is dead?"

"I cannot say, sir; but I think he is."

"Go to the police at once and let them see the monkey. They must send up and have the body removed. If they find the knife I hope it may prove to be Periyar's."

"I have no fear, sir, about their inquiries. All will be proved as I have said; and the missie will say the same."

"You can go now," said Warborough, taking the rein. "I will see Miss Armscote home."

"The syce is bringing the carriage, sir, and he should be here soon," said the old pensioner as he saluted.

He unfastened Pishasha and moved swiftly down the road, passing out of sight. Warborough returned to Nonia,

who had risen and seated herself on a boulder of rock. She was busy rearranging her dress which had been torn away at the neck. Warborough glanced at the reddened skin which was beginning to discolour where the man's fingers had gripped it. It was as well that she had no glass, for the sight of the bruises might have alarmed her.

The brute! the fiend! he thought, as he watched her. He deserved his fate however he came by it. Could it have been the monkey? The animal's arm was strong and sinewy. It might have been capable of dealing deadly blows. But would it understand so thoroughly the use of the knife? It was human to use a weapon. Then he remembered Pishasha and the pumpkin; and how he remarked at the time that he used the stick as if it were a dagger. There was method in his actions then. He wanted to get at the inside of the gourd, and it was easier to use the pointed stick than to bite and tear at the tough outer skin. Was it possible that there was method in his recent action; that he knew enough to kill with a knife rather than to attack with his teeth which would not kill with the same certainty as the knife? Then he recalled the look that Houssain had given him as they talked; and he hoped for the Muhammadan's sake that the knife would not prove to be Houssain's.

When Nonia had put her collar in order as far as was possible, he asked if she would be able to bear the journey back.

"I have sent Houssain to the police station with the monkey, and I am going to drive you home as soon as the syce comes with the carriage. You will be able to bear the drive?"

"Yes; the faintness is quite gone. Who will go up there and——"

He stopped her with a gesture. "You are not to think

anything more about it; it is all arranged. Didn't I see the mongoose when I arrived? where is he?" he asked, hoping to divert her attention.

His device was successful. Nonia was suddenly filled with anxiety over her pet. After a short search Warborough found Ricki where Houssain had tethered him, and restored him to his mistress.

The carriage arrived shortly after, and they started on the homeward journey, the syce leading Warborough's horse.

Nonia had sustained a very severe shock, but otherwise was not hurt except for the bruised neck. Warborough noted with satisfaction that she was able to get into the carriage without assistance. He took the seat by her side and drove. During the journey they were silent. The last occasion when he drove her home was after the ball. For him the sky had cleared since then, and he possessed the knowledge of her true position. All doubt had vanished; the future was assured. That knowledge enabled him, if he chose, to make good his claim to her love; but he felt that she was not fit for even the additional excitement of knowing that happiness was within her grasp.

Nursing the mongoose she leaned back on the cushions, feeling as if she had been through some horrible dream. The presence of Warborough by her side stilled her nerves. Nothing seemed to matter with him there. Now and then she let her eyes rest on his profile. It was like looking at some sheltering rock; it gave a sense of security that brought back calmness after storm, and helped to restore her balance of mind.

She did not speak until they arrived at the gate; then she tried to thank him, but broke down. He bade her to be quiet with a new authority. It had its effect as he

walked the pony slowly to the door. By the time she got down from the carriage she had recovered herself.

"Go to your room and lie down. I will tell Miss Madersfield what has happened; and I shall ask her not to allow you to talk."

The pressure of his hand reassured her that love, anxious devoted love, was behind his peremptory words.

"When may I see you again?" she asked, like a child that feared denial.

"To-morrow morning after breakfast."

Without waiting for a reply he turned away and asked Miss Madersfield to let him come into the drawing-room. For a wonder she consented to listen in silence, and he told her the story of the attack on Nonia as far as he knew it.

"Nonia has plenty of sense," said Aunt Mary. "All she wants is a good night's rest."

"I am not so sure of that. When your life has been attempted with violence and you escape by the skin of your teeth, you are very apt to have nerves when you least expect it."

"The man, you say, is dead. She need not be afraid of a second attack."

"All the same, it will be necessary for her to have a change as soon as possible. She will have to give evidence which will revive the horror of it all; but after the inquiry you must both pack up and go to England."

"Nonia is not easy to lead in such matters. She takes her own way."

"I think you will find that she will fall in with my wishes."

"Oh!" said Miss Madersfield, with sudden comprehension. "I'm glad; very glad."

Warborough met Lutterworth on the road.

"How is Miss Armscote after her terrible encounter

with that scoundrel?" asked the Assistant Superintendent.

Warborough gave his version of the story, and Lutterworth said—

"It never rains but it pours! Just as I've sent my Head Inspector off to the scene of this extraordinary murder by the monkey—I never heard of such a thing in my life—I get a wire from head-quarters telling me to arrest Pensax."

"What for?"

"You'll never guess! Political spy! said to be in the employment of a foreign European Power! Now we know what all that prospecting meant! Why couldn't the authorities have given me a hint? It's too late to lay my hand upon him now. The man is gone. He must have had a hint, and he was making his escape when you saw him yesterday. I suppose he asked you not to tell any tales."

"You couldn't have done anything if I had told you. You had no authority to arrest him or to stop him."

"That's true enough. When you saw him he was about to take one of two courses; and he was resting before he started. He either went down the ghat and took the night mail to Bombay; in which case with the help of the wires they will catch him on the arrival of the train at Bombay. It has been confidently reported to me that he took this line."

"And the other?"

"A tramp over the hills westwards by one of those little-known paths which it was his business to mark out on his maps. He will make his way to a port on the Malabar coast; get to Colombo in a native vessel, and there he will easily lose his identity and find a ship to take him to any part of the world he likes."

"I wonder?" was Warborough's comment.

"So do I! To tell you the truth, I shouldn't grieve if

he gave them the slip. It would teach them a lesson—not to try to gather the plums that belong to another man's garden."

"An unpleasant task having to arrest one of your own class; so perhaps it is as well on the whole," said Warborough, by way of consoling his friend.

"His was a bold game to play at any time; but it was well paid. A man must have a sporting instinct, and be a bit of an adventurer to take to that sort of thing," remarked Lutterworth.

"Do you think he will be caught?"

"Not a bit of it. He's far too sharp. They can't blame me if he escapes. How was I to guess what the fellow was up to? Now I must go up the hill and see about this Hindu's death. It's the queerest case I've ever had. Anyway, we have the satisfaction of knowing that he thoroughly deserved what he got. He would have killed Miss Armscote if the monkey hadn't killed him."

"You've seen Houssain?"

"And the monkey; never saw such a sight in my life!"

CHAPTER XXXII

On the following day, soon after breakfast, Warborough rode up to Chamra House. The air was clear and the mountains were steeped in blue that seemed to have been stolen direct from the sky itself. A soft breeze came from the highlands, brushing the foliage into whiteness as it lifted the leaves and showed their pale under side. Birds, butterflies, and bees rejoiced in the summer morning as if life had no dark side, no death to dog its footsteps.

He dismounted at the gate and the syce led the horse round to the stable. He walked slowly along the carriage drive with its grassy bank on one side, and its flower border and mimosa bushes on the other. It always reminded him of the afternoon when he was welcomed so unexpectedly by Teddy. Poor Teddy! for Nonia's sake he was sorry the bear was dead, but otherwise he had no regrets at the dispersion of her happy family. There would shortly have been difficulties over the disposal of the creatures; for Warborough fully intended to take Nonia away almost immediately. They would go home together and be married as soon as the way could be cleared for the ceremony.

He glanced towards the tennis courts where Teddy had held him up against the wire-netting screen, and he caught sight of Nonia beyond the mimosa fence. He turned off the drive and joined her.

"So glad to see you out," he said linking his arm in hers

and guiding her steps towards the seat at the further end. "It shows that you are better."

"I am quite well except for my throat, which is badly bruised and turning all sorts of colours; well enough to fret over my historical diamonds; they are gone!"

"Never mind the diamonds. I'll give you some more when we get to England. Did you sleep last night?"

"Fairly well; I was so tired," she replied, as she seated herself on the bench under the mimosa that divided the courts from the shrubbery.

He sat down by her and slipping an arm round her, he kissed her at will, till she suddenly remembered that this was not as yet permissible.

"You mustn't! you mustn't!" she cried, as she yielded helplessly and willingly again.

"Yes, I may; it's all right; quite all right; and you're practically free!"

"Am I? are you sure? and how do you know? You haven't had a cable from Colonel Tredmere, have you?"

In answer to her string of questions he told her that he had seen Dick, who had assured him that Clara was a widow right enough when she was married the second time. Dick had tried very hard to find a flaw in his marriage after he discovered the woman's weakness so that he could free himself from her; but he could not do it.

"Why didn't he tell his uncle this?" asked Nonia.

"I fancy that Colonel Tredmere was very angry, too angry to do more than send his nephew out of the house with an order that he was never to show his face there again. The sight of Clara as she made good her claim upset the colonel. Added to that came certain information that angered him still more and made him ashamed of his nephew. Pensax in revenge left him under the impression that the first marriage was illegal, and that you were his

wife. I imagine that poor Colonel Tredmere has been living in constant dread of Pensax claiming his supposed rights. However, the trouble is all over now, and the doubt cleared up by Pensax himself."

"I may really love you without fear?" she said, turning to him with gladness, the warm colour coming back into the cheeks that had paled before the violence of the Hindu and had not yet recovered.

"Without fear," he replied softly.

* * * * *

They decided to tell no one except Miss Madersfield. By this means they would avoid a string of questions, some of which might be difficult to answer. Their love was of that deep quality that shrank from publicity. Warborough was not like Berringham, whose emotions bubbled to the surface however deeply set they might be. Later when the tangle was smoothed out and the day fixed they would ask their friends for congratulations.

Warborough's leave was granted, and he left Coonoor a fortnight later. Nonia and Miss Madersfield were to join him at Bombay, and they were to sail by the same boat.

The inquiry into the cause of the Hindu's death was held and Nonia gave her evidence. It was sufficient to implicate the monkey; and the story of the attack was a nine-days' wonder. Her evidence was corroborated by the Muhammadan, who swore to having seen the monkey jump through the window on to the dying man. He further declared that he himself called off the monkey as it was biting and tearing at the prostrate body.

Abdul and Houssain sat in the light of the afternoon sun by the empty dens. All the animals were gone, including the brooding kite, whose wing was sufficiently healed to bear it up into the azure of the sky once more.

"The monkey is safe, my father; and again its fur is black," said the boy.

"Right, my son; it was only fitting that Pishasha should live."

The two remained silent. A question was burning on Abdul's lips. At length he summoned up courage enough to ask it.

"Is it permitted, my father, to know how it was done?"

The old sepoy came a step nearer and slowly rolled up the sleeve of his coat, baring his arm. Abdul gazed at it in surprise. It was covered with grey hair, like the hair of a monkey. Then he turned the sleeve down glancing quickly to right and left, to assure himself of not having been spied upon.

"I was on the frontier with the regiment, and an Afghan drew his sword on me suddenly when I was unprepared. He cut down my arm, which I lifted to shield my neck, taking away the skin from the elbow to the wrist. The doctor sahib said I must die if the place was not covered with skin at once. There was a man in the regiment who had a monkey and he gave it to save my life. The skin, warm and wet, was placed on the wound and bound down. It was done in the hospital tent and was said to be a wonderful cure. Many gentlemen came to see it. When I got well I was discharged from the hospital, took my pension, and went back to my village on the west coast. I carried the secret with me. I tried to shave off the grey hair, but it grew and grew; the more I cut it the thicker it became. Then I kept my arm hidden under my coat, and I lived by myself without wife or brother, so that no one might know the shame the doctor sahib had put upon me in giving me a monkey's arm. One day a hawker passing through the village offered me a monkey for sale. I

bought it and named it Pishasha. Ever since then Pishasha has been the owner of the monkey's arm, and not Houssain; it was so when the stone was thrown at the Hindu as he crept through the jungle after the missie to steal her diamonds; and when the Hindu tried to strangle her in the drinking-place of the soldiers."

"It was Allah's will, my father."

Houssain bowed his head.

"At first I cursed the doctor sahib even though he had given me life; but who can tell what Allah will do when He puts forth His hand? Did He not make me thus that I might save the life of the missie? It was kismet."

"And no one, not even the Archangel Gabriel, can escape kismet. See! Here comes the Captain Sahib."

"Stand, my son, and salute, even as I used to salute my colonel."

They rose to their feet as Warborough approached. He had been spending the afternoon at Chamra House.

"Good evening, Houssain; good evening, Abdul," he said, acknowledging their salutes.

"Master is going to England?" asked the old sepoy after he had dismissed Abdul.

"Yes; and the missie goes with me. When we come back she will be my wife."

"Good! very good, sahib! Allah be praised! When she comes back there will be no bad Hindu to kill her."

"I hope not! Where's the monkey?"

"The police ordered him to be killed. Master knows that the missie gave proper evidence and the blame fell on Pishasha. The monkey did not love the Hindu."

"Nor did you! So you have killed him, poor beast?"

"Not I myself, sir. How could I kill my little brother? the companion of my sleeping and waking hours! I sent him into the jungle with Abdul—who had his orders."

"And has carried them out?"

"Certainly, sir. The monkey will not return. He will be dead to this place, and the police will be satisfied. Pishasha saved the missie's life; even the big police officer allowed so much. It is hard that he should die."

"We are all agreed that if the monkey had not attacked the Hindu, the Hindu would have killed missie," said Warborough.

They looked at each other steadily and with comprehension.

"Therefore the monkey deserves to live and not to die."

"I agree with you there, Houssain."

"The colonel sahib said to his slave before he left: 'Guard the missie with your arm and with your life, and the blessing of Allah will rest upon you.' His orders have been carried out as if he were still at the head of the regiment and I his orderly."

There was a pause; the minds of both men were filled with but one subject, yet neither liked to speak. It was Warborough who broke the ice.

"I understand," said Warborough, in a low voice. "I will tell the colonel all, and he will be as grateful as I am to the monkey for saving her life."

"There is but one thing more to say to your honour. The diamonds; they are here."

He drew from his pocket the necklace and offered it to Warborough.

"Take it, sir; and when the missie is your wife, she will wear it again without fear. Until then she will only look at it with the remembrance of the devil who tried to kill her."

"How did you come by it?" asked Warborough.

"It was in his hand. Look, sahib, you will find blood

on it; Periyar's blood. He had torn it from the missie's neck, and he would have killed her to silence her talk; but Allah—may He be praised!—willed otherwise."

"Why didn't you speak when the search was made?"

"Because I told the police officer that I never touched the body. I said that I lifted the missie at once in my arms and carried her away. Before doing so I looked to see if the evil one still breathed. It was impossible that he should be allowed to live; and I feared that the monkey's arm had not struck deep enough from the window; but he was dead and nothing more was needed. I took the knife and, wiping it on Pishasha, I hurled it far into the thick jungle where it could never be found. All this I did while the missie was lying without sense in the chair. Then I lifted her and carried her down to the road by a shorter path that is used also by the soldiers; and by-and-by she opened her eyes again and spoke."

There was one other matter that Warborough felt curious about.

"What was your last quarrel with Periyar about?" he asked.

"The Hindu stole my horn with which I ruled the animals. It was necessary that there should be obedience, or the bear and panther would have given trouble as master knows."

He put his hand inside Teddy's kennel and drew out an old megaphone.

"Through this I talked to the beasts when they were disobedient; and the large noise of my voice filled them with fear, which is a better master and more compelling than pain. Missie would not give leave for the stick to be used; but it was necessary to use something that would keep order and make them obey," he added as if in excuse for his strange methods.

"Why did the Hindu steal it? He had no beasts to rule."

"He stole it so that he might make the cry of the devil and frighten away the police."

"I understand; and the devil, did he make that too?"

"If master will go to the tree that stands alone and hangs over the cliff, he will find a string. By pulling the rope a board is lifted. It is fastened to another board by hinges, and its back is painted the colour of the rock. As the string is pulled, it opens up like the lid of a box and shows the face of terror painted on the under side. The board has rags tied on each side, and they look like arms. The police fear it and run when they see it. The devil will not come again now that Periyar is gone, and thy slave has the magic horn back in his keeping."

There was silence. The sun had sunk below the hills and the earth was flooded with the warm light of the afterglow. It was just such an evening as when Warborough had heard the cry of the imaginary hyæna on the hill above the house.

"You are going back to your coast, the missie tells me."

"With Adbul, who is like a son to me; he will enlist in one of the regiments."

"And you?" asked Warborough.

The old man replied, "If it is Allah's will, I come back to master to be bodyguard to master's son. Missie will have no time for bears and panthers then. It will be enough to look after the beautiful babas that Allah will send with white skins, eyes like the hills and cheeks like the roses in missie's garden. This slave will help to carry them abroad and to play baba games in the verandah when it is too hot to walk. The mongoose will live with me till she returns; and Abdul, who will be a sepoy by then, will come and see the babas when he gets leave."

The glow of the evening seemed to have entered Warborough's soul, and the world was as full of joy as it was of light.

* * * * *

It was six months later. Warborough had heard with something like satisfaction of Pensax's escape. When the train arrived at Bombay he was nowhere to be found; nor was there any evidence of his having left the train on the way. He must have adopted the plan suggested by Lutterworth. With his peculiar knowledge of the country he could easily have accomplished what other men without that knowledge would not have ventured upon.

Warborough and Nonia were travelling abroad on the continent. The town in which they happened to be staying for a couple of nights was *en fête*. They inquired the reason, and were told that "Milord" Penn-Saxe of the diplomatic service was marrying the daughter of a rich Jew who had made a large fortune in Africa. No; she was not pretty, but she had a good heart and was very kind. He was handsome and clever; and he had a beautiful voice. It was by his love songs, so report said, that he had captured the heiress. As she listened to the story Nonia's eyes met her husband's and she smiled.

"That can be no other than Dick himself," she said. "I can fancy him wooing the Jewish maid in picturesque fashion and winning her love! I hope he will be happy. Poor Dick! he was not bad at heart!"

"He was a sportsman," replied Warborough.

"Oh no!" objected Nonia. "I should never have found it in my heart to like him if he killed or murdered inoffensive creatures."

"There are many ways of finding sport without taking life. Pensax once told me that he was an adventurer at heart, and he spoke the truth. The term fits him better

than sportsman. I should like to know what became of Maud Honington."

"Didn't I tell you? I heard of her from Pansy the other day when we met the Berringhams. She was just engaged to a man in the medical service."

"I wonder if Ivy has met her fate yet?"

"I think from what Pansy said that she intends to arrange it for her. Ivy is to return with them when they rejoin the regiment."

"Oh! you women!" he laughed. "And who is the happy man to be?"

"Why, Captain Devon, of course!" replied Nonia.

"Are you quite sure that he is the best-looking man she has ever met?" he asked, remembering Ivy's little trait.

"She will be quite sure of the fact when she has renewed her acquaintance with him; but there is to be no hurry or rush about it. Ivy is still very young for her age."

"Quite right! As the Oriental says, 'Haste is of the devil; only bad people run!'"

THE END

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